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Matthew Flower.



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THE BRAVO.

A VENETIAN STORY.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"THE PILOT," "THE BORDERERS," "THE
WATER WITCH," &c.

"Giustizia in palazzo,
E pane in piazza."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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THE BRAVO.

CHAPTER I.

“ Which is the merchant here, and which the Jew ? ”

SHAKSPEARE.

THE evening of such a day, in a city with the habits of Venice, was not likely to be spent in the dulness of retirement. The great square of St. Mark was again filled with its active and motley crowd, and the scenes already described in the opening chapters of this work, were re-

sumed, if possible, with more apparent devotion to the levities of the hour, than on the occasion mentioned. The tumblers and jugglers renewed their antics, the cries of the fruit-sellers and other venders of light luxuries were again mingled with the tones of the flute and the notes of the guitar and harp, while the idle and the busy, the thoughtless and the designing, the conspirator and the agent of the police, once more met in privileged security.

The night had advanced beyond its turn, when a gondola came gliding through the shipping of the port, with that easy and swan-like motion, which is peculiar to its slow movement, and touched the quay with its beak, at the point where the canal of St. Mark forms its junction with the bay.

"Thou art welcome, Antonio," said one, who approached the solitary individual that had directed the gondola, when the latter had thrust the iron spike of his painter between the crevices of the stones, as gondoliers are accustomed

to secure their barges; "thou art welcome, Antonio, though late."

"I begin to know the sounds of that voice, though they come from a masked face," said the fisherman. "Friend, I owe my success to-day to thy kindness, and though it has not had the end for which I had both hoped and prayed, I ought not to thank thee less. Thou hast thyself been borne hard upon by the world, or thou wouldst not have bethought thee of an old and despised man, when the shouts of triumph were ringing in thy ear, and when thy own young blood was stirred with the feelings of pride and victory."

"Nature gives thee strong language, fisherman. I have not passed the hours, truly, in the games and levities of my years. Life has been no festa to me—but no matter. The senate was not pleased to hear of lessening the number of the gallies' crew, and thou wilt bethink thee of some other reward. I have, here, the chain

and golden oar in the hope that it will still be welcome."

Antonio looked amazed, but, yielding to a natural curiosity, he gazed a moment with longing at the prize. Then, recoiling with a shudder, he uttered moodily, and with the tones of one whose determination was made: "I should think the bauble coined of my grand-child's blood! Keep it: they have trusted it to thee, for it is thine of right, and now that they refuse to hear my prayer, it will be useless to all but to him who fairly earned it."

"Thou makest no allowance, fisherman, for difference of years and for sinews that are in their vigour. Methinks that in adjudging such a prize, thought should be had to these matters, and then wouldest thou be found outstripping us all. Holy St. Theodore! I passed my childhood with the oar in hand, and never before have I met one in Venice who has driven my gondola so hard! Thou touchest the water with the delicacy of a lady fingering her harp,

and yet with the force of the wave rolling on the Lido !”

“ I have seen the hour, Jacopo, when even thy young arm would have tired, in such a strife between us. That was before the birth of my eldest son, who died in battle with the Ottoman, when the dear boy he left me was but an infant in arms. Thou never sawest the comely lad, good Jacopo ?”

“ I was not so happy, old man ; but if he resembled thee, well mayest thou mourn his loss. Body of Diana ! I have little cause to boast of the small advantage youth and strength gave me.”

“ There was a force within that bore me and the boat on—but of what use hath it been ? Thy kindness, and the pain given to an old frame, that hath been long racked by hardship and poverty, are both thrown away on the rocky hearts of the nobles.”

“ We know not yet, Antonio. The good saints will hear our prayers, when we least think

they are listening. Come with me, for I am sent to seek thee."

The fisherman regarded his new acquaintance with surprise, and then turning to bestow an instant of habitual care on his boat, he cheerfully professed himself ready to proceed. The place where they stood was a little apart from the thoroughfare of the quays, and though there was a brilliant moon, the circumstance of two men, in their garbs, being there, was not likely to attract observation; but Jacopo did not appear to be satisfied with this security from remark. He waited until Antonio had left the gondola, and, then, unfolding a cloak, which had lain on his arm, he threw it, without asking permission, over the shoulders of the other. A cap, like that he wore himself, was next produced, and being placed on the gray hairs of the fisherman, effectually completed his metamorphosis.

"There is no need of a mask," he said, examining his companion attentively, when his

task was accomplished. "None would know thee, Antonio, in this garb."

"And is there need of what thou hast done, Jacopo? I owe thee thanks for a well-meant, and, but for the hardness of heart of the rich and powerful, for what would have proved, a great kindness. Still I must tell thee, that a mask was never yet put before my face; for what reason can there be, why one who rises with the sun to go to his toil, and who trusteth to the favour of the blessed St. Anthony for the little he hath, should go abroad like a gallant ready to steal the good name of a virgin, or a robber at night?"

"Thou knowest our Venetian custom, and it may be well to use some caution, in the business we are on."

"Thou forgettest that thy intention is yet a secret to me. I say it again, and I say it with truth and gratitude, that I owe thee many thanks, though the end is defeated, and the boy is still a prisoner in the floating-school of



wickedness—but thou hast a name, Jacopo, that I could wish did not belong to thee. I find it hard to believe all that they have this day said, on the Lido, of one who has so much feeling for the weak and wronged.”

The Bravo ceased to adjust the disguise of his companion, and the profound stillness which succeeded his remark, proved so painful to Antonio, that he felt like one reprieved from suffocation, when he heard the deep respiration that announced the relief of his companion.

“ I would not willingly say—”

“ No matter,” interrupted Jacopo, in a low voice. “ No matter, fisherman ; we will speak of these things on some other occasion. At present, follow, and be silent.”

As he ceased, the self-appointed guide of Antonio beckoned for the latter to come on, when he led the way from the water-side. The fisherman obeyed, for little did it matter to one poor and heart-stricken as he, whither he was conducted. Jacopo took the first entrance into

the court of the doge's palace. His footstep was leisurely, and to the passing multitude they appeared like any others of the thousands, who were abroad to breathe the soft air of the night, or to enter into the pleasures of the piazza.

When within the dimmer and broken light of the court, Jacopo paused, evidently to scan the persons of those it contained. It is to be presumed he saw no reason to delay, for with a secret sign to his companion to follow, he crossed the area, and mounted the well-known steps, down which the head of the Faliero had rolled, and which, from the statues on the summit, is called the Giant's Stairs. The celebrated mouths of the lions were passed, and they were walking swiftly along the open gallery, when they encountered a halberdier of the ducal guard.

"Who comes?" demanded the mercenary, throwing forward his long and dangerous weapon.

"Friends to the state and to St. Mark."

"None pass, at this hour, without the word."

Jacopo motioned to Antonio to stand fast, while he drew nearer to the halberdier and whispered. The weapon was instantly thrown up, and the sentinel again paced the long gallery, with practised indifference. The way was no sooner cleared than they proceeded. Antonio, not a little amazed at what he had already seen, eagerly followed his guide, for his heart began to beat high with an exciting, but undefined hope. He was not so ignorant of human affairs as to require to be told, that those who ruled would some time concede that in secret, which policy forbade them to yield openly. Full, therefore, of the expectation of being ushered into the presence of the doge himself, and of having his child restored to his arms, the old man stepped lightly along the gloomy gallery, and darting through an entrance, at the heels of Jacopo, he found himself at the foot of another flight of massive steps. The route now became confused to the fisherman, for, quitting the more public vomitories of the palace, his



companion held his way by a secret door, through many dimly lighted and obscure passages. They ascended and descended frequently, as often quitting or entering rooms of but ordinary dimensions and decorations, until the head of Antonio was completely turned, and he no longer knew the general direction of their course. At length they stopped, in an apartment of inferior ornaments, and of a dusky colour, which the feeble light rendered still more gloomy.

“Thou art well acquainted with the dwelling of our prince,” said the fisherman, when his companion enabled him to speak, by checking his swift movements. “The oldest gondolier of Venice is not more ready on the canals, than thou appearest to be among these galleries and corridors.”

“’Tis my business to bring thee hither, and what I am to do, I endeavour to do well. Antonio, thou art a man that feareth not to stand in the presence of the great, as this day

hath shewn. Summon thy courage, for a moment of trial is before thee."

"I have spoken boldly to the doge. Except the Holy Father, himself, what power is there on earth beside to fear?"

"Thou mayest have spoken, fisherman, too boldly. Temper thy language, for the great love not words of disrespect."

"Is truth unpleasant to them?"

"That as may be. They love to hear their own acts praised, when their acts have merited praise, but they do not like to hear them condemned, even though they know what is said to be just."

"I fear me," said the old man, looking with simplicity at the other, "there is little difference between the powerful and the weak, when the garments are stripped from both, and the man stands naked to the eye."

"That truth may not be spoken here."

"How! Do they deny that they are christians, and mortals, and sinners!"

“They make a merit of the first, Antonio—they forget the second, and they never like to be called the last, by any but themselves.”

“I doubt, Jacopo, after all, if I get from them the freedom of the boy.”

“Speak them fair, and say nought to wound their self-esteem, or to menace their authority—they will pardon much, if the last, in particular, be respected.”

“But it is that authority which has taken away my child! Can I speak in favour of the power which I know to be unjust?”

“Thou must feign it, or thy suit will fail.”

“I will go back to the Lagunes, good Jacopo, for this tongue of mine hath ever moved at the bidding of the heart. I fear I am too old to say that a son may righteously be torn from the father by violence. Tell them, thou, from me, that I came thus far, in order to do them respect, but, that seeing the hopelessness of beseeching further, I have gone to my



nets, and to my prayers to blessed St. Anthony."

As he ceased speaking, Antonio wrung the hand of his motionless companion, and turned away, as if to retire. Two halberds fell to the level of his breast, ere his foot had quitted the marble floor, and he now saw, for the first time, that armed men crossed his passage, and that, in truth, he was a prisoner. Nature had endowed the fisherman with a quick and just perception, and long habit had given great steadiness to his nerves. When he perceived his real situation, instead of entering into useless remonstrance, or in any manner betraying alarm, he again turned to Jacopo with an air of patience and resignation.

"It must be that the illustrious Signore wish to do me justice," he said, smoothing the remnant of his hair, as men of his class prepare themselves for the presence of their superiors, "and it would not be decent, in a humble fisherman, to refuse them the opportunity. It

would be better, however, if there were less force used here in Venice, in a matter of simple right and wrong. But the great love to shew their power, and the weak must submit."

"We shall see!" answered Jacopo, who had manifested no emotion during the abortive attempt of the other to retire.

A profound stillness succeeded. The halberdiers maintained their rigid attitudes, within the shadow of the wall, looking like two insensible statues, in the attire and armour of the age, while Jacopo and his companion occupied the centre of the room, with scarcely more of the appearance of consciousness and animation. It may be well to explain, here, to the reader, some of the peculiar machinery of the state, in the country of which we write, and which is connected with the scene that is about to follow: for the name of a republic, a word which, if it mean any thing, strictly implies the representation and supremacy of the general interests, but which has so frequently been prostituted to the

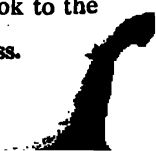


protection and monopolies of privileged classes, may have induced him to believe that there was, at least, a resemblance between the outlines of that government, and the more just, because more popular, institutions of his own country.

In an age, when rulers were profane enough to assert, and the ruled weak enough to allow, that the right of a man to govern his fellows was a direct gift from God, a departure from the bold and selfish principle, though it were only in profession, was thought sufficient to give a character of freedom and common sense to the polity of a nation. This belief is not without some justification, since it establishes in theory, at least, the foundations of government on a base sufficiently different from that which supposes all power to be the property of one, and that one to be the representative of the faultless and omnipotent Ruler of the Universe. With the first of these principles we have nothing to do, except it be to add that there are propositions so inherently false, that they only require to be fairly

stated to produce their own refutation ; but our subject necessarily draws us into a short digression on the errors of the second, as they existed in Venice.

It is probable that when the patricians of St. Mark created a community of political rights in their own body, they believed their state had done all that was necessary to merit the high and generous title it assumed. They had innovated on a generally received principle, and they cannot claim the distinction of being either the first, or the last, who have imagined that to take the incipient steps in political improvement, is at once to reach the goal of perfection. Venice had no doctrine of divine right, and as her prince was little more than a pageant, she boldly laid claim to be called a republic. She believed that a representation of the most prominent and brilliant interests of society was the paramount object of government, and faithful to the seductive, but dangerous, error, she mistook for the last, collective power for social happiness.



It may be taken as a governing principle, in all civil relations, that the strong will grow stronger, and the feeble more weak, until the first become unfit to rule, or the last unable to endure. In this important truth is contained the secret of the downfall of all those states which have crumbled beneath the weight of their own abuses. It teaches the necessity of widening the foundations of society, until the base shall have a breadth capable of securing the just representation of every interest, without which the social machine is liable to interruption from its own movement, and eventually to destruction from its own excesses.

Venice, though ambitious and tenacious of the name of a republic, was, in truth, a narrow, a vulgar, and an exceedingly heartless oligarchy. To the former title she had no other claim than her denial of the naked principle already mentioned, while her practice is liable to the reproach of the two latter, in the unmanly and narrow character of its exclusion, in

every act of her foreign policy, and in every measure of her internal police. An aristocracy must ever want the high personal feeling which often tempers despotism by the qualities of the chief, or the generous and human impulses of a popular rule. It has the merit of substituting things for men, it is true, but unhappily it substitutes the things of a few men for those of the whole. It partakes, and it always has partaken, though necessarily tempered by circumstances and the opinions of different ages, of the selfishness of all corporations, in which the responsibility of the individual, while his acts are professedly submitted to the temporizing expedients of a collective interest, is lost in the sub-division of numbers. At the period of which we write, Italy had several of these self-styled commonwealths, in not one of which, however, was there ever a fair and just confiding of power to the body of the people, though perhaps there is not one that has not been cited, sooner or later, in proof of the inability of



man to govern himself! In order to demonstrate the fallacy of a reasoning, which is so fond of predicting the downfall of our own liberal system, supported by examples drawn from trans-atlantic states of the middle ages, it is necessary only to recount here, a little in detail, the forms in which power was obtained and exercised, in the most important of them all.

Distinctions in rank, as separated entirely from the will of the nation, formed the basis of Venetian polity. Authority, though divided, was not less a birthright, than in those governments in which it was openly avowed to be a dispensation of Providence. The patrician order had its high and exclusive privileges, which were guarded and maintained with a most selfish and engrossing spirit. He who was not born to govern, had little hope of ever entering into the possession of his natural rights; while he who was, by the intervention of chance, might wield a power of the most fearful and despotic character. At a certain age all of

senatorial rank (for, by a specious fallacy, nobility did not take its usual appellations) were admitted into the councils of the nation. The names of the leading families were inscribed in a register, which was well entitled the "Golden Book," and he who enjoyed the envied distinction of having an ancestor thus enrolled, could, with a few exceptions (such as that named in the case of Don Camillo), present himself in the senate, and lay claim to the honours of the "Horned Bonnet." Neither our limits, nor our object will permit a digression of sufficient length to point out the whole of the leading features of a system so vicious, and which was, perhaps, only rendered tolerable to those it governed; by the extraneous contributions of captured and subsidiary provinces, on which, in truth, as in all cases of metropolitan rule, the oppression weighed most grievously. The reader will at once see, that the very reason why the despotism of the self-styled republic was



tolerable to its own citizens, was but another cause of its eventual destruction.

As the senate became too numerous to conduct, with sufficient secrecy and despatch, the affairs of a state that pursued a policy alike tortuous and complicated, the more general of its important interests were entrusted to a council composed of three hundred of its members. In order to avoid the publicity and delay of a body large even as this, a second selection was made, which was known as the Council of Ten, and to which much of the executive power, that aristocratical jealousy withheld from the titular chief of the state, was confided. To this point the political economy of the Venetian republic, however faulty, had at least some merit for simplicity and frankness. The ostensible agents of the administration were known, and though all real responsibility to the nation was lost, in the superior influence and narrow policy of the patricians, the rulers could not entirely escape from the odium that public opinion might attach

to their unjust or illegal proceedings. But a state, whose prosperity was chiefly founded on the contribution and support of dependants, and whose existence was equally menaced by its own false principles, and by the growth of other and neighbouring powers, had need of a still more efficient body, in the absence of that executive which its own republican pretensions denied to Venice. A political inquisition, which came in time to be one of the most fearful engines of police ever known, was the consequence. An authority, as irresponsible as it was absolute, was periodically confided to another and still smaller body, which met and exercised its despotic and secret functions, under the name of the Council of Three. The choice of these temporary rulers was decided by lot, and in a manner that prevented the result from being known to any but to their own number, and to a few of the most confidential of the more permanent officers of the government. Thus there existed, at all times, in the heart of Venice, a



mysterious and despotic power, that was wielded by men who moved in society unknown, and apparently surrounded by all the ordinary charities of life; but which, in truth, was influenced by a set of political maxims, that were perhaps as ruthless, as tyrannic, and as selfish as ever were invented by the evil ingenuity of man. It was, in short, a power that could only be entrusted, without abuse, to infallible virtue and infinite intelligence, using the terms in a sense limited by human means; and yet it was here confided to men, whose title was founded on the double accident, of birth—and the colours of balls, and by whom it was wielded, without even the check of publicity.

The Council of Three met in secret, ordinarily issued its decrees without communicating with any other body, and had them enforced with a fearfulness of mystery, and a suddenness of execution, that resembled the blows of fate. The doge himself was not superior to its authority, nor protected from its decisions, while

it has been known that one of the privileged three has been denounced by his companions. There is still in existence a long list of the state maxims which this secret tribunal recognised as its rule of conduct, and it is not saying too much to affirm, that they set at defiance every other consideration but expediency,—all the recognised laws of God, and every principle of justice, which is esteemed among men. The advances of the human intellect, supported by the means of publicity, may temper the exercise of a similar irresponsible power, in our own age, but in no country has this substitution, of a soulless corporation for an elective representation, been made, in which a system of rule has not been established, that sets at nought the laws of natural justice and the rights of the citizen. Any pretension to the contrary, by placing profession in opposition to practice, is only adding hypocrisy to usurpation.

It appears to be an unavoidable general consequence that abuses should follow, when power

is exercised by a permanent and irresponsible body, from whom there is no appeal. When this power is secretly exercised the abuses become still more grave. It is also worthy of remark, that in the nations which submit, or have submitted to these undue and dangerous influences, the pretensions to justice and generosity are of the most exaggerated character; for while the fearless democrat vents his personal complaints aloud, and the voice of the subject of professed despotism is smothered entirely, necessity itself dictates to the oligarchist the policy of seemliness, as one of the conditions of his own safety. Thus Venice prided herself on the justice of St. Mark, and few states maintained a greater shew, or put forth a more lofty claim to the possession of the sacred quality, than that whose real maxims of government were veiled in a mystery that even the loose morality of the age exacted.

CHAPTER II.

“A power that if but named
In casual converse, be it where it might,
The speaker lower'd, at once, his voice, his eyes,
And pointed upward as at God in heaven.”

ROBERTS.

THE reader has probably anticipated, that Antonio was now standing in an ante-chamber of the secret and stern tribunal, described in the preceding chapter. In common with all of his class, the fisherman had a vague idea of the existence, and of the attributes of the council before which he was to appear; but his simple apprehension was far from comprehending the extent, or the nature of functions that

equally took cognizance of the most important interests of the republic, and of the more trifling concerns of a patrician family. While conjectures on the probable result of the expected interview were passing through his mind, an inner door opened, and an attendant signed for Jacopo to advance.

The deep and imposing silence which instantly succeeded the entrance of the summoned into the presence of the Council of Three, gave time for a slight examination of the apartment and of those it contained. The room was not large for that country and climate, but rather of a size suited to the closeness of the councils that had place within its walls. The floor was tessellated with alternate pieces of black and white marble; the walls were draped in one common and sombre dress of black cloth; a single lamp of dark bronze was suspended over a solitary table in its centre, which, like every other article of the scanty furniture, had the same melancholy covering as the walls. In the

angles of the room there were projecting closets, which might have been what they seemed, or merely passages into the other apartments of the palace. All the doors were concealed from casual observation by the hangings, which gave one general and chilling aspect of gloom to the whole scene. On the side of the room opposite to that on which Antonio stood, three men were seated in curule chairs; but their masques and the drapery which concealed their forms, prevented all recognition of their persons. One of this powerful body wore a robe of crimson, as the representative that fortune had given to the select council of the doge, and the others robes of black, being those which had drawn the lucky, or rather the unlucky balls, in the Council of Ten, itself a temporary and chance-created body of the senate. There were one or two subordinates near the table, but these, as well as the still more humble officials of the place, were hid from all ordinary knowledge, by disguises similar to those of the chiefs. Jacopo

regarded the scene like one accustomed to its effect, though with evident reverence and awe; but the impression on Antonio was too manifest to be lost. It is probable that the long pause which followed his introduction, was intended to produce, and to note this effect, for keen eyes were intently watching his countenance during its continuance.

“Thou art called Antonio, of the Lagunes?” demanded one of the secretaries near the table, when a sign had been secretly made from the crimson member of that fearful tribunal, to proceed.

“A poor fisherman, eccellenza, who owes much to blessed Saint Antonio of the Miraculous Draught.”

“And thou hast a son who bears thine own name, and who follows the same pursuit?”

“It is the duty of a christian to submit to the will of God! My boy has been dead twelve years, come the day when the republic’s gallies chased the infidel from Corfu

to Candia. He was slain, noble Signore, with many others of his calling, in that bloody fight."

There was a movement of surprise among the clerks, who whispered together, and appeared to examine the papers in their hands, with some haste and confusion. Glances were sent back at the judges, who sate motionless, wrapped in the impenetrable mystery of their functions. A secret sign, however, soon caused the armed attendants of the place to lead Antonio and his companion from the room.

"Here is some inadvertency!" said a stern voice, from one of the masqued Three, so soon as the fall of the footsteps of those who retired was no longer audible. "It is not seemly that the inquisition of St. Mark should shew this ignorance."

"It touches merely the family of an obscure fisherman, illustrious Signore," returned the trembling dependant; "and it may be that

his art would wish to deceive us in the opening interrogatories."

"Thou art in error," interrupted another of the Three. "The man is named Antonio Vecchio, and, as he sayeth, his only child died in the hot affair with the Ottoman. He of whom there is question, is a grandson, and is still a boy."

"The noble Signore is right!" returned the clerk.—"In the hurry of affairs we have misconceived a fact, which the wisdom of the council has been quick to rectify. St. Mark is happy in having among his proudest and oldest names, senators who enter thus familiarly into the interests of his meanest children!"

"Let the man be again introduced," resumed the judge, slightly bending his head to the compliment. "These accidents are unavoidable in the press of affairs."

The necessary order was given, and Antonio, with his companion constantly at his elbow, was brought once more into the presence.

"Thy son died' in the service of the republic, Antonio?" demanded the secretary.

"Signore, he did. Holy Maria have pity on his early fate and listen to my prayers! So good a child, and so brave a man can have no great need of masses for his soul, or his death would have been doubly grievous to me, since I am too poor to buy them."

"Thou hast a grandson?"

"I had one, noble senator; I hope he still lives."

"He is not with thee in thy labours on the Lagunes?"

"San Teodoro grant that he were! he is taken, Signore, with many more of tender years, into the gallies, whence may our Lady give him a safe deliverance! If your eccellenza has an opportunity to speak with the general of the gallies, or with any other who may have authority in such a matter, on my knees, I pray you to speak in behalf of the child, who is a good and pious lad, that seldom casts a

line into the water, without an ave or a prayer to St. Anthony, and who has never given me uneasiness, until he fell into the gripe of St. Mark."

"Rise—This is not the affair in which I have to question thee. Thou hast this day spoken of thy prayer to our most illustrious prince, the doge?"

"I have prayed his highness to give the boy liberty."

"And this thou hast done openly, and with little deference to the high dignity and sacred character of the chief of the republic?"

"I did it like a father and a man. If but half what they say of the justice and kindness of the state were true, his highness would have heard me as a father and a man."

A slight movement among the fearful Three, caused the secretary to pause; when he saw, however, that his superiors chose to maintain their silence, he continued—

"This didst thou once in public and among

the senators, but when repulsed, as urging a petition both out of place and out of reason, thou soughtest other means to prefer thy request?"

"True, illustrious Signore."

"Thou camest among the gondoliers of the regatta in an unseemly garb, and placed thyself foremost with those who contended for the favour of the senate and its prince?"

"I came in the garb which I wear before the Virgin and St. Antonio, and if I was foremost in the race, it was more owing to the goodness and favour of the man at my side, than any virtue which is still left in these withered sinews and dried bones. San Marco remember him in his need, for the kind wish, and soften the hearts of the great to hear the prayer of a childless parent!"

There was another slight expression of surprise, or curiosity, among the inquisitors, and once more the secretary suspended his examination.

"Thou hearest, Jacopo," said one of the



Three. "What answer dost thou make the fisherman?"

"Signore, he speaketh truth."

"And thou hast dared to trifle with the pleasures of the city, and to set at nought the wishes of the doge!"

"If it be a crime, illustrious senator, to have pitied an old man who mourned for his offspring, and to have given up my own solitary triumph to his love for the boy, I am guilty."

There was a long and silent pause after this reply. Jacopo had spoken with habitual reverence, but with the grave composure that appeared to enter deeply into the composition of his character. The paleness of the cheek was the same, and the glowing eye, which so singularly lighted and animated a countenance that possessed a hue not unlike that of death, scarce varied its gaze, while he answered. A secret sign caused the secretary to proceed with his duty.

"And thou owest thy success in the regatta,

Antonio, to the favour of thy competitor—he who is now with thee, in the presence of the council?”

“Under San Teodoro and St. Antonio, the city’s patron and my own.”

“And thy whole desire was to urge again thy rejected petition in behalf of the young sailor?”

“Signore, I had no other. What is the vanity of a triumph among the gondoliers, or the bauble of a mimic oar and chain, to one of my years and condition?”

“Thou forgettest that the oar and chain are gold?”

“Excellent gentlemen, gold cannot heal the wounds which misery has left on a heavy heart. Give me back the child, that my eyes may not be closed by strangers, and that I may speak good council into his young ears, while there is hope my words may be remembered, and I care not for all the metals of the Rialto! Thou mayest see that I utter no vain vaunt, by this jewel,



which I offer to the nobles, with the reverence due to their greatness and wisdom."

When the fisherman had done speaking, he advanced, with the timid step of a man unaccustomed to move in superior presences, and laid upon the dark cloth of the table a ring that sparkled with, what at least seemed to be, very precious stones. The astonished secretary raised the jewel, and held it in suspense before the eyes of the judges.

"How is this?" exclaimed he of the Three, who had oftenest interfered in the examination; "that seemeth the pledge of our nuptials!"

"It is no other, illustrious senator: with this ring did the doge wed the Adriatic, in the presence of the ambassadors and the people."

"Hadst thou aught to do with this, also, Jacopo?" sternly demanded the judge.

The Bravo turned his eye on the jewel with a look of interest, but his voice maintained its usual depth and steadiness as he answered,

“Signore, no — until now, I knew not the fortune of the fisherman.”

A sign to the secretary caused him to resume his questions.

“Thou must account, and clearly account, Antonio,” he said, “for the manner in which this sacred ring came into thy possession ; hadst thou any one to aid thee in obtaining it ?”

“Signore, I had.”

“Name him, at once, that we take measures for his security.”

“’Twill be useless, Signore ; he is far above the power of Venice.”

“What meanest thou, fellow ? None are superior to the right and the force of the republic that dwell within her limits. Answer without evasion, as thou valuest thy person.”

“I should prize that which is of little value, Signore, and be guilty of a great folly, as well as of a great sin, were I to deceive you, to save a body old and worthless as mine from stripes. If your excellencies are willing to hear, you

will find that I am no less willing to tell the manner in which I got the ring."

"Speak, then, and trifle not."

"I know not, Signori, whether you are used to hearing untruths, that you caution me so much not to deal with them ; but we of the Lagunes are not afraid to say what we have seen and done, for most of our business is with the winds and waves, which take their orders from God himself. There is a tradition, Signori, among us fishermen, that in times past, one of our body brought up from the bay, the ring with which the doge is accustomed to marry the Adriatic. A jewel of that value was of little use to one who cast his nets daily for bread and oil, and he brought it to the doge, as became a fisherman, into whose hands the saints had thrown a prize to which he had no title, as it were to prove his honesty. This act of our companion is much spoken of on the Lagunes and at the Lido, and it is said there is a noble painting done by some of our Venetian masters,

in the halls of the palace, which tells the story as it happened; shewing the prince on his throne, and the lucky fisherman with his naked legs, rendering back to his highness that which had been lost. I hope there is foundation for this belief, Signori, which greatly flatters our pride, and is not without use in keeping some among us truer to the right, and better favoured in the eyes of St. Anthony, than might otherwise be."

"The fact was so."

"And the painting, excellent Signore? I hope our vanity has not deceived us concerning the picture, neither?"

"The picture you mention is to be seen within the palace."

"Corpo di Bacco! I have had my misgivings on that point, for it is not common that the rich and the happy should take such note of what the humble and the poor have done. Is the work from the hands of the great Tiziano himself, eccellenza?"

“It is not ; one of little name hath put his pencil to the canvass.”

“They say that Tiziano had the art of giving to his works the look and richness of flesh, and one would think that a just man might find, in the honesty of the poor fisherman, a colour bright enough to have satisfied even his eye. But it may be that the senate saw danger in thus flattering us of the Lagunes.”

“Proceed with the account of thine own fortune with the ring.”

“Illustrious nobles, I have often dreamed of the luck of my fellow of the old times ; and more than once have I drawn the nets with an eager hand in my sleep, thinking to find that very jewel entangled in its meshes, or embowelled by some fish. What I have so often fancied has at last happened. I am an old man, Signori, and there are few pools or banks between Fusina and Giorgio, that my lines or my nets have not fathomed or covered. The spot to which the Bucentoro is wont to steer in these

ceremonies is well known to me, and I had a care to cover the bottom round about with all my nets in the hope of drawing up the ring. When his highness cast the jewel, I dropped a buoy to mark the spot—Signori, this is all—my accomplice was St. Anthony.”

“For doing this you had a motive?”

“Holy Mother of God! Was it not sufficient to get back my boy from the gripe of the gallies?” exclaimed Antonio, with an energy and a simplicity that are often found to be in the same character. “I thought that if the doge and the senate were willing to cause pictures to be painted, and honours to be given to one poor fisherman for the ring, they might be glad to reward another, by releasing a lad who can be of no great service to the republic, but who is all to his parent.”

“Thy petition to his highness, thy strife in the regatta, and thy search for the ring, had the same object?”

“To me, Signore, life has but one.”



There was a slight but suppressed movement among the council.

“When thy request was refused by his highness as ill-timed—”

“Ah! *eccellenza*, when one has a white head and a failing arm, he cannot stop to look for the proper moment in such a cause!” interrupted the fisherman, with a gleam of that impetuosity which forms the true base of Italian character.

“When thy request was denied, and thou hadst refused the reward of the victor, thou went among thy fellows and fed their ears with complaints of the injustice of St. Mark, and of the senate’s tyranny?”

“Signore, no. I went away sad and heart-broken, for I had not thought the doge and nobles would have refused a successful gondolier so light a boon.”

“And this thou didst not hesitate to proclaim among the fishermen and idlers of the Lido?”

“Eccellenza, it was not needed—my fellows knew my unhappiness, and tongues were not wanting to tell the worst.”

“There was a tumult, with thee at its head, and sedition was uttered, with much vain-boasting of what the fleet of the Lagunes could perform against the fleet of the republic.”

“There is little difference, Signore, between the two, except that the men of the one go in gondolas with nets, and the men of the other are in the galleys of the state. Why should brothers seek each other’s blood?”

The movement among the judges was more manifest than ever. They whispered together, and a paper containing a few lines written rapidly in pencil, was put into the hands of the examining secretary.

“Thou didst address thy fellows, and spoke openly of thy fancied wrongs ; thou didst comment on the laws which require the services of the citizens, when the republic is compelled to send forth a fleet against its enemies.”

"It is not easy to be silent, Signore, when the heart is full."

"And there was consultation among thee of coming to the palace in a body, and of asking the discharge of thy grandson from the doge, in the name of the rabble of the Lido."

"Signore, there were some generous enough to make the offer, but others were of advice it would be well to reflect before they took so bold a measure."

"And thou—what was thine own counsel on that point?"

"Eccellenza, I am old, and though unused to be thus questioned by illustrious senators, I had seen enough of the manner in which St. Mark governs, to believe a few unarmed fishermen and gondoliers would not be listened to with—"

"Ha! Did the gondoliers become of thy party? I should have believed them jealous, and displeased with the triumph of one who was not of their body."

“A gondolier is a man, and though they had the feelings of human nature on being beaten, they had also the feelings of human nature when they heard that a father was robbed of his son.—Signore,” continued Antonio, with great earnestness and a singular simplicity, “there will be great discontent on the canals, if the gallies sail with the boy aboard them !”

“Such is thy opinion ;—were the gondoliers on the Lido numerous ?”

“When the sports ended, eccellenza, they came over by hundreds, and I will do the generous fellows the justice to say, that they had forgotten their want of luck in the love of justice. Diamine ! these gondoliers are not so bad a class as some pretend, but they are men like ourselves, and can feel for a christian as well as another !”

The secretary paused, for his task was done ; and a deep silence pervaded the gloomy apartment. After a short pause one of the three resumed—



“Antonio Vecchio,” he said, “thou hast served thyself in these said gallies, to which thou now seemest so averse—and served bravely, as I learn?”

“Signore, I have done my duty by St. Mark. I played my part against the infidel, but it was after my beard was grown, and at an age when I had learnt to know good from evil. There is no duty more cheerfully performed by us all, than to defend the islands and the Lagoon against the enemy.”

“And all the republic’s dominions.—Thou canst make no distinctions between any of the rights of the state.”

“There is a wisdom granted to the great, which God hath denied the poor and the weak, Signore. To me it does not seem clear that Venice, a city built on a few islands, hath any more right to carry her rule into Crete or Candia, than the Turk hath to come here.”

“How! Dost thou dare, on the Lido, to question the claim of the republic to her con-

quests ! or do the irreverent fishermen dare thus to speak lightly of her glory !”

“Eccellenza, I know little of rights that come by violence. God hath given us the Lagunes, but I know not that he has given us more. This glory of which you speak may sit lightly on the shoulders of a senator, but it weighs heavily on a fisherman’s heart.”

“Thou speakest, bold man, of that which thou dost not comprehend.”

“It is unfortunate, Signore, that the power to understand hath not been given to those who have so much power to suffer.”

An anxious pause succeeded this reply.

“Thou mayest withdraw, Antonio,” said he, who apparently presided in the dread councils of the Three. “Thou wilt not speak of what has happened, and thou wilt await the inevitable justice of St. Mark, in full confidence of its execution.”

“Thanks, illustrious senator ; I will obey your excellency ; but my heart is full, and I

would fain say a few words concerning the child, before I quit this noble company."

"Thou mayest speak—and here thou mayest give free vent to all thy wishes, or to all thy griefs, if any thou hast. St. Mark has no greater pleasure than to listen to the wishes of his children."

"I believe they have reviled the republic in calling its chiefs heartless, and sold to ambition!" said the old man, with generous warmth, disregarding the stern rebuke which gleamed in the eye of Jacopo. "A senator is but a man, and there are fathers and children among them, as among us of the Lagunes."

"Speak, but refrain from seditious or discreditable discourse," uttered a secretary, in a half-whisper. "Proceed."

"I have little now to offer, Signori; I am not used to boast of my services to the state, excellent gentlemen, but there is a time when human modesty must give way to human nature. These scars were got in one of the

proudest days of St. Mark, and in the foremost of all the gallies that fought among the Greek islands. The father of my boy wept over me then, as I have since wept over his own son—yes—I might be ashamed to own it among men ; but if the truth must be spoken, the loss of the boy has drawn bitter tears from me in the darkness of night, and in the solitude of the Lagoon. I lay many weeks, Signori, less a man than a corpse, and when I got back again to my nets and my toil, I did not withhold my son from the call of the republic. He went in my place to meet the infidel—a service from which he never came back. This was the duty of men who had grown in experience, and who were not to be deluded into wickedness by the evil company of the gallies. But this calling of children into the snares of the devil grieves a father, and—I will own the weakness, if such it be—I am not of a courage and pride to send forth my own flesh and blood into the danger and corruption of war and evil society, as in

days when the stoutness of the heart was like the stoutness of the limbs. Give me back, then, my boy, till he has seen my old head laid beneath the sands, and until, by the aid of blessed St. Anthony, and such councils as a poor man can offer, I may give him more steadiness in his love of the right, and until I may have so shaped his life, that he will not be driven about by every pleasant or treacherous wind that may happen to blow upon his bark. Signori, you are rich, and powerful, and honoured, and though you may be placed in the way of temptations to do wrongs that are suited to your high names and illustrious fortunes, ye know little of the trials of the poor. What are the temptations of the blessed St. Anthony himself, to those of the evil company of the gallies ! And now, Signori, though you may be angry to hear it, I will say, that when an aged man has no other kin on earth, or none so near as to feel the glow of the thin blood of the poor, than one poor boy, St. Mark would do well to remember

that even a fisherman of the Lagunes can feel as well as the doge on his throne. This much I say, illustrious senators, in sorrow, and not in anger; for I would get back the child, and die in peace with my superiors, as with my equals."

"Thou mayest depart," said one of the Three.

"Not yet, Signore, I have still more to say of the men of the Lagunes, who speak with loud voices, concerning this dragging of boys into the service of the gallies."

"We will hear their opinions."

"Noble gentlemen, if I were to utter all they have said, word for word, I might do some disfavour to your ears! Man is man, though the Virgin and the saints listen to his aves and prayers from beneath a jacket of serge and a fisherman's cap. But I know too well my duty to the senate to speak so plainly. But, Signori, they say, saving the bluntness of their language, that St. Mark should have ears for the meanest of his people as well as for the richest noble; and that not a hair should fall from the head

4

of a fisherman, without its being counted as if it were a lock from beneath the horned bonnet ; and that where God hath not made marks of his displeasure, man should not."

" Do they dare to reason thus ?"

" I know not if it be reason, illustrious Signore, but it is what they say, and, eccellenza, it is holy truth. We are poor workmen of the Lagunes, who rise with the day to cast our nets, and return at night to hard beds and harder fare ; but with this we might be content, did the senate count us as christians and men. That God hath not given to all the same chances in life, I well know, for it often happens that I draw an empty net, when my comrades are groaning with the weight of their draughts ; but this is done to punish my sins, or to humble my heart, whereas it exceeds the power of man to look into the secrets of the soul, or to foretel the evil of the still innocent child. Blessed St. Anthony knows how many years of suffering this visit to the gallies may cause to the child

in the end. Think of these things, I pray you, Signori, and send men of tried principles to the wars."

"Thou mayest retire," rejoined the judge.

"I should be sorry that any who cometh of my blood," continued the inattentive Antonio, "should be the cause of ill-will between them that rule and them that are born to obey. But nature is stronger even than the law, and I should discredit her feelings were I to go without speaking as becomes a father. Ye have taken my child and sent him to serve the state at the hazard of body and soul, without giving opportunity for a parting kiss, or a parting blessing—ye have used my flesh and blood as ye would use the wood of the arsenal, and sent it forth upon the sea as if it were the insensible metal of the balls ye throw against the infidel. Ye have shut your ears to my prayers, as if they were words uttered by the wicked, and when I have exhorted you on my knees, wearied my stiffened limbs to do ye pleasure,



rendered ye the jewel which St. Anthony gave to my net, that it might soften your hearts, and reasoned with you calmly on the nature of your acts, you turn from me coldly, as if I were unfit to stand forth in defence of the offspring that God hath left my age! This is not the boasted justice of St. Mark, Venetian senators, but hardness of heart and a wasting of the means of the poor, that would ill become the most grasping Hebrew of the Rialto!"

"Hast thou aught more to urge, Antonio?" asked the judge, with the wily design of unmasking the fisherman's entire soul.

"Is it not enough, Signore, that I urge my years, my poverty, my scars, and my love for the boy? I know ye not, but though ye are hid behind the folds of your robes and masks, still must ye be men. There may be among ye a father, or perhaps some one who hath a still more sacred charge, the child of a dead son. To him I speak. In vain ye talk of justice when the weight of your power falls on

them least able to bear it; and though ye may delude yourselves, the meanest gondolier of the canal knows—”

He was stopped from uttering more by his companion, who rudely placed a hand on his mouth.

“Why hast thou presumed to stop the complaints of Antonio?” sternly demanded the judge.

“It was not decent, illustrious senators, to listen to such disrespect in so noble a presence,” Jacopo answered, bending reverently as he spoke. “This old fisherman, dread Signori, is warmed by love for his offspring, and he will utter that which, in his cooler moments, he will repent.”

“St. Mark fears not the truth! If he has more to say, let him declare it.”

But the excited Antonio began to reflect. The flush which had ascended to his weather-beaten cheek disappeared, and his naked breast ceased to heave. He stood like one rebuked,

more by his discretion than his conscience, with a calmer eye, and a face that exhibited the composure of his years, and the respect of his condition—

“ If I have offended, great patricians,” he said, more mildly, “ I pray you to forget the zeal of an ignorant old man, whose feelings are master of his breeding, and who knows less how to render the truth agreeable to noble ears, than to utter it.”

“ Thou mayest depart.”

The armed attendants advanced, and, obedient to a sign from the secretary, they led Antonio and his companion through the door by which they had entered. The other officials of the place followed, and the secret judges were left by themselves in the chamber of doom.

CHAPTER III.

"O! the days that we have seen."

SHELTON.

A PAUSE like that which accompanies self-contemplation, and perhaps conscious distrust of purpose, succeeded. Then the Three arose, together, and began to lay aside the instruments of their disguise. When the masks were removed, they exposed the grave visages of men in the decline of life, athwart which worldly cares and worldly passions had drawn those deep lines, which no subsequent ease or resignation can erase. During the pro-

cess of unrobing neither spoke, for the affair, on which they had just been employed, caused novel and disagreeable sensations to them all. When they were delivered from their superfluous garments and their masks, however, they drew near the table, and each sought that relief for his limbs and person which was natural to the long restraint he had undergone.

“There are letters from the French king intercepted,” said one, after time had permitted them to rally their thoughts;—“it would appear they treat of the new intentions of the emperor.”

“Have they been restored to the ambassador? or are the originals to go before the senate?” demanded another.

“On that must we take council, at our leisure. I have nought else to communicate, except that the order given to intercept the messenger of the Holy See hath failed of its object.”

“Of this the secretaries advertised me. We must look into the negligence of the agents, for there is good reason to believe much useful

knowledge would have come from that seizure."

"As the attempt is already known and much spoken of, care must be had to issue orders for the arrest of the robbers, else may the republic fall into disrepute with its friends. There are names on our list which might be readily marked for punishment, for that quarter of our patrimony is never in want of proscribed, to conceal an accident of this nature."

"Good heed will be had to this, since, as you say, the affair is weighty. The government or the individual that is negligent of reputation, cannot expect long to retain the respect of its equals."

"The ambition of the House of Hapsburgh, robs me of my sleep!" exclaimed the other, throwing aside some papers, over which his eye had glanced, in disgust. "Holy St. Theodore! what a scourge to the race is the desire to augment territories and to extend an unjust rule, beyond the boundaries of reason and nature! Here have we, in Venice, been in undisputed

possession of provinces that are adapted to our institutions, convenient to our wants, and agreeable to our desires, for ages. Provinces that were gallantly won by our ancestors, and which cling to us as habits linger in our age, and yet are they become objects of a covetous ambition to our neighbour, under a vain pretext of a policy, that I fear is strengthened by our increasing weakness. I sicken, Signori, of my esteem for men, as I dive deeper into their tempers and desires, and often wish myself a dog, as I study their propensities. In his appetite for power, is not the Austrian the most rapacious of all the princes of the earth?"

"More so, think you, worthy Signore, than the Castilian? You overlook the unsatiated desire of the Spanish king to extend his sway in Italy."

"Hapsburgh or Bourbon; Turk or Englishman; they all seem actuated by the same fell appetite for dominion; and now that Venice hath no more to hope, than to preserve her present

advantages, the least of all our enjoyments becomes a subject of covetous envy to our enemies. These are passions to weary one of an interference with governments, and to send him to his cord of penitence and the cloisters !”

“ I never listen to your observations, Signore, without quitting the chamber an edified man ! Truly this desire in the strangers to trespass on our privileges, and it may be well said, privileges which have been gained by our treasures and our blood, becomes more manifest, daily. Should it not be checked, St. Mark will be stripped, in the end, of even a landing-place for a gondola on the main.”

“ The leap of the winged lion is much curtailed, excellent Sir, or these things might not be ! It is no longer in our power to persuade, or to command, as of old, and our canals begin to be encumbered with slimy weeds, instead of well-freighted argosies, and swift-sailing feluccas.”

“ The Portuguese hath done us ir retrievable harm, for without his African discoveries, we

might yet have retained the traffic in Indian commodities. I cordially dislike the mongrel race, being, as it is, half Gothic and half Moorish !”

“ I trust not myself to think of their origin or of their deeds, my friend, lest prejudice should kindle feelings unbecoming a man and a christian.—How now, Signor Gradenigo ; thou art thoughtful ?”

The third member of the secret council, who had not spoken since the disappearance of the accused, and who was no other than the reader’s old acquaintance of the name just mentioned, slowly lifted his head, from a meditative position, at this address.

“ The examination of the fisherman hath recalled scenes of my boyhood,” he answered, with a touch of nature, that seldom found place in that chamber.

“ I heard thee say, he was thy foster-brother,” returned the other, struggling to conceal a gape.

"We drank of the same milk, and, for the first years of life, we sported at the same games."

"These imaginary kindred often give great uneasiness. I am glad your trouble hath no other source, for I had heard that the young heir of your house hath shewn a prodigal disposition of late, and I feared that matter might have come to your knowledge, as one of the council, that a father might not wish to learn."

The selfish features of the Signor Grad-nigo, instantly underwent a change. He glanced curiously, and with a strong distrust, but in a covert manner, at the fallen eyes of his two companions, anxious to penetrate their secret thoughts ere he ventured to expose his own.

"Is there aught of complaint against the youth?" he demanded, in a voice of hesitation. "You understand a father's interest, and will not conceal the truth."

"Signore, you know that the agents of the police are active, and little that comes to their

knowledge fails to reach the ears of the council. But, at the worst, the matter is not of life or death. It can only cost the inconsiderate young man a visit to Dalmatia, or an order to waste the summer at the foot of the Alps."

"Youth is the season of indiscretion, as ye know, Signori," returned the father, breathing more freely, "and as none become old that have not been young, I have little need to awaken your recollection of its weaknesses. I trust my son is incapable of designing aught against the republic?"

"Of that he is not suspected." A slight expression of irony crossed the features of the old senator, as he spoke. "But he is represented as aiming too freely at the person and wealth of your ward; and that she, who is the especial care of St. Mark, is not to be solicited without the consent of the senate, is an usage well known to one of its most ancient and most honourable members."

"Such is the law, and none coming of me

shall shew it disrespect. I have preferred my claims to that connection, openly, but with diffidence, and I await the decision of the state, in respectful confidence."

His associates bowed in courteous acknowledgment of the justice of what he said, and of the loyalty of his conduct, but it was in the manner of men too long accustomed to duplicity, to be easily duped.

"None doubt it, worthy Signor Gradenigo, for thy faith to the state is ever quoted as a model for the young, and as a subject for the approbation of the more experienced. Hast thou any communications to make on the interests of the young heiress, thyself?"

"I am pained to say, that the deep obligation conferred by Don Camillo Monforte, seems to have wrought upon her youthful imagination, and I apprehend that, in disposing of my ward, the state will have to contend with the caprice of a female mind. The waywardness of that

age will give more trouble, than the conduct of far graver matters."

"Is the lady attended by suitable companions, in her daily life?"

"Her companions are known to the Senate. In so grave an interest, I would not act without their authority and sanction. But the affair hath great need of delicacy in its government. The circumstance, that so much of my ward's fortune lies in the states of the church, renders it necessary to await the proper moment for disposing of her rights, and of transferring their substance within the limits of the republic, before we proceed to any act of decision. Once assured of her wealth, she may be disposed of, as seemeth best to the welfare of the state, without further delay."

"The lady hath a lineage and riches, and an excellence of person, that might render her of great account in some of these knotty negotiations, which so much fetter our movements of late. The time hath been, when a daughter of

Venice, not more fair, was wooed to the bed of a sovereign."

"Signore, those days of glory and greatness exist no longer. Should it be thought expedient to overlook the natural claims of my son, and to bestow my ward to the advantage of the republic, the most that can be expected through her means, is a favourable concession in some future treaty, or a new prop to some of the many decaying interests of the city. In this particular, she may be rendered of as much, or even of more use, than the oldest and wisest of our body. But that her will may be free, and the child may have no obstacles to her happiness, it will be necessary to make a speedy determination of the claim preferred by Don Camillo. Can we do better than to recommend a compromise, that he may return without delay to his own Calabria?"

"The concern is weighty, and it demands deliberation."

"He complains of our tardiness already, and

not without shew of reason. It is five years since the claim was first preferred."

"Signor Gradenigo, it is for the vigorous and healthful to display their activity, the aged and the tottering must move with caution. Were we, in Venice, to betray precipitation in so weighty a concern, without seeing an immediate interest in the judgment, we should trifle with a gale of fortune that every scirocco will not blow into the canals. We must have terms with the lord of Sant Agata, or we greatly slight our own advantage."

"I hinted of the matter to your excellencies, as a consideration for your wisdom; methinks it will be something gained to remove one so dangerous, from the recollection, and from before the eyes, of a love-sick maiden."

"Is the damsel so amorous?"

"She is of Italy, Signore, and our sun bestows warm fancies and fervent minds."

"Let her to the confessional and her prayers! The godly prior of St. Mark will discipline

her imagination, till she shall conceit the Neapolitan a Moor and an Infidel. Just San Teodoro, forgive me ! But thou canst remember the time, my friends, when the penance of the church was not without service, on thine own fickle tastes and truant practices."

"The Signor Gradenigo was a gallant in his time," observed the third, "as all well know who travelled in his company. Thou wert much spoken of at Versailles and at Vienna,—nay, thou canst not deny thy vogue to one, who, if he hath no other merit, hath a memory."

"I protest against these false recollections," rejoined the accused, a withered smile lighting his faded countenance ; "we have been young Signori ; but among us all, I never knew a Venetian of more general fashion and of better report, especially with the dames of France, than he who has just spoken."

"Account it not—account it not—'twas the weakness of youth and the use of the times !—



I remember to have seen thee, Enrico, at Madrid, and a gayer or more accomplished gentleman was not known at the Spanish court."

"Thy friendship blinded thee—I was a boy and full of spirits; no more, I may assure thee. Didst hear of my affair with the mousquetaire, when at Paris?"

"Did I hear of the general war?—Thou art too modest to raise this doubt of a meeting that occupied the coteries for a month, as it had been a victory of the powers! Signor Gradenigo, it was a pleasure to call him countryman at that time, for I do assure thee, a sprightlier or a more gallant gentleman did not walk the terrace."

"Thou tellest me of what my own eyes have been a witness. Did I not arrive when men's voices spoke of nothing else?—A beautiful court and a pleasant capital were those of France in our day, Signori."

"None pleasanter, or of greater freedom of intercourse—St. Mark aid me with his prayers!

The many pleasant hours that I have passed between the Marais and the Chateau. Didst ever meet La Comtesse de Mignon in the gardens?"

" Zitto—thou growest loquacious, caro ; nay, she wanted not for grace and affability, that I will say. In what a manner they played in the houses of resort, at that time !"

" I know it to my cost. Will you lend me your belief, dear friends ? I arose from the table of La Belle Duchesse de ———, the loser of a thousand sequins, and to this hour it seemeth but a moment that I was occupied."

" I remember the evening.—Thou wert seated between the wife of the Spanish ambassador, and a miladi of England. Thou wert playing at rouge-et-noir, in more ways than one, for thy eyes were on thy neighbours instead of thy cards—Giulio, I would have paid half the loss, to have read the next epistle of the worthy senator thy father !"

" He never knew it—he never knew it.—we

had our friends on the Rialto, and the account was settled a few years later. Thou wast well with Ninon, Enrico?"

"A companion of her leisure, and one who basked in the sunshine of her wit."

"Nay, they said thou wert of more favour—"

"Mere gossip of the salons. I do protest, gentlemen,—not that others were better received—but idle tongues will have their discourse!"

"Wert thou of the party, Alessandro, that went in a fit of gaiety from country to country, till it numbered ten courts at which it appeared in as many weeks?"

"Was I not its mover? What a memory art thou getting! 'Twas for a hundred golden louis, and it was bravely won by an hour. A postponement of the reception by the elector of Bavaria, went near to defeat us, but we bribed the groom of the chambers, as thou mayest remember, and got into the presence as it were by accident."

“ Was that held to be sufficient ? ”

“ That was it, for our terms mentioned the condition of holding discourse with ten sovereigns, in as many weeks, in their own palaces. Oh ! it was fairly won ; and I believe I may say that it was as gaily expended ! ”

“ For the latter will I vouch, since I never quitted thee while a piece of it all remained. There are divers means of dispensing gold in those northern capitals, and the task was quickly accomplished. They are pleasant countries for a few years of youth and idleness ! ”

“ It is a pity that their climates are so rude. ”

A slight and general shudder expressed their Italian sympathy, but the discourse did not the less proceed.

“ They might have a better sun, and a clearer sky, but there is excellent cheer, and no want of hospitality, ” observed the Signor Gradenigo, who maintained his full share of the dialogue, though we have not found it necessary to separate sentiments that were so common

among the different speakers. "I have seen pleasant hours even with the Genoese, though their town hath a cast of reflection and sobriety, that is not always suited to the dispositions of youth."

"Nay, Stockholm, and Copenhagen have their pleasures too, I do assure thee. I passed a season between them. Your Dane is a good joker and a hearty bottle companion."

"In that the Englishman surpasseth all! If I were to relate their powers of living in this manner, dear friends, ye would discredit me. That which I have seen often, seemeth impossible even to myself. 'Tis a gloomy abode, and one that we of Italy little like, in common."

"Name it not in comparison with Holland—wert ever in Holland, friends?—didst ever enjoy the fashion of Amsterdam and the Hague! I remember to have heard a young Roman urge a friend to pass a winter there; for the witty rogue termed it, the beau ideal of the land of petticoats!"

The three old Italians, in whom this sally excited a multitude of absurd recollections and pleasant fancies, broke out into a general and hearty fit of laughter. The sound of their cracked merriment, echoing in that gloomy and solemn room, suddenly recalled them to the recollection of their duties. Each listened an instant, as if in expectation that some extraordinary consequence was to follow so extraordinary an interruption of the usual silence of the place, like a child whose truant propensities were about to draw detection on his offence,—and then the principal of the council furtively wiped the tears from his eyes, and resumed his gravity.

“Signori,” he said, fumbling in a bundle of papers, “we must take up the matter of the fisherman—but we will first inquire into the circumstance of the signet left, the past night, in the lion’s mouth. Signor Gradenigo, you were charged with the examination.”

“The duty hath been executed, noble Sirs,

and with a success I had not hoped to meet with. Haste, at our last meeting, prevented a perusal of the paper to which it was attached, but it will now be seen that the two have a connection. Here is an accusation which charges Don Camillo Monforte with a design to bear away, beyond the power of the senate, the Donna Violetta, my ward, in order to possess her person and riches. It speaketh of proofs in possession of the accuser, as if he were an agent entrusted by the Neapolitan. As a pledge of his truth, I suppose, for there is no mention made of any other use, he sends the signet of Don Camillo himself, which cannot have been obtained without that noble's confidence."

"Is it certain that he owns the ring?"

"Of that am I well assured. You know I am especially charged with conducting his personal demand with the senate, and frequent interviews have given me opportunity to note that he was wont to wear a signet, which is now

wanting. My jeweller of the Rialto hath sufficiently identified this, as the missing ring."

"Thus far it is clear, though there is an obscurity in the circumstance that the signet of the accused should be found with the accusation, which, being unexplained, renders the charge vague and uncertain. Have you any clue to the writing, or any means of knowing whence it comes?"

There was a small but nearly imperceptible red spot on the cheek of the Signor Gradenigo, that did not escape the keen distrust of his companions, but he concealed his alarm, answering distinctly that he had none.

"We must then defer a decision for further proof. The justice of St. Mark hath been too much vaunted to endanger its reputation by a hasty decree, in a question which so closely touches the interest of a powerful noble of Italy. Don Camillo Monforte hath a name of distinction, and counteth too many of note among his kindred, to be dealt with as we might

dispose of a gondolier, or the messenger of some foreign state."

"As respects him, Signore, you are undoubtedly right. But may we not endanger our heiress by too much tenderness?"

"There are many convents in Venice, Signore."

"The monastic life is ill suited to the temper of my ward," the Signor Gradenigo drily observed, "and I fear to hazard the experiment; gold is a key to unlock the strongest cell; besides, we cannot with due observance of propriety place a child of the state in durance."

"Signor Gradenigo, we have had this matter under long and grave consideration, and agreeably to our laws, when one of our number hath a palpable interest in the affair, we have taken council of his highness, who is of accord with us in sentiment. Your personal interest in the lady might have warped your usually excellent judgment; else, be assured, we should have summoned you to the conference."

The old senator, who thus unexpectedly found himself excluded from consultation, on the very matter, that, of all others, made him most value his temporary authority, stood abashed and silent—reading in his countenance, however, a desire to know more, his associates proceeded to communicate all it was their intention he should hear.

“It hath been determined to remove the lady to a suitable retirement, and for this purpose care hath been already had to provide the means. Thou wilt be temporarily relieved of a most grievous charge, which cannot but have worked heavily on thy spirits, and, in other particulars, have lessened thy much-valued usefulness to the republic.”

This unexpected communication was made with marked courtesy of manner; but with an emphasis and tone, that sufficiently acquainted the Signor Gradenigo with the nature of the suspicions that beset him. He had too long been familiar with the sinuous policy of the

council, in which, at intervals, he had so often sat, not to understand that he would run the risk of a more serious accusation were he to hesitate in acknowledging its justice. Teaching his features, therefore, to wear a smile as treacherous as that of his wily companion, he answered with seeming gratitude.

“His highness and you, my excellent colleagues, have taken counsel of your good wishes and kindness of heart, rather than of the duty of a poor subject of St. Mark, to toil on in his service while he hath strength and reason for the task,” he said. “The management of a capricious female mind is a concern of no light moment, and while I thank you for this consideration of my case, you will permit me to express my readiness to resume the charge whenever it shall please the state again to confer it.”

“Of this none are more persuaded than we, nor are any better satisfied of your ability to discharge the trust faithfully. But you enter,

Signore, into all our motives, and will join us in the opinion, that it is equally unbecoming the republic, and one of its most illustrious citizens, to leave a ward of the former in a position that shall subject the latter to unmerited censure. Believe me, we have thought less of Venice in this matter, than of the honour and the interests of the house of Gradenigo; for, should this Neapolitan thwart our views, you of us all would be most liable to be disapproved of."

"A thousand thanks, excellent Sir," returned the deposed guardian. "You have taken a load from my mind, and restored some of the freshness and elasticity of youth! The claim of Don Camillo now is no longer urgent, since it is your pleasure to remove the lady, for a season, from the city."

"'Twere better to hold it in deeper suspense, if it were only to occupy his mind. Keep up thy communications, as of wont, and withhold not hope, which is a powerful exciter in minds

that are not deadened by experience. We shall not conceal from one of our number, that a negociation is already near a termination, which will relieve the state from the care of the damsel, and at some benefit to the republic. Her estates lying without our limits greatly facilitate the treaty, which hath only been withheld from your knowledge, by the consideration, that of late, we have rather too much overloaded thee with affairs."

Again the Signor Gradenigo bowed submissively, and with apparent joy. He saw that his secret design had been penetrated, notwithstanding all his practised duplicity, and specious candour, and he submitted with that species of desperate resignation, which becomes a habit, if not a virtue, in men long accustomed to be governed despotically. When this delicate subject, which required the utmost finesse of Venetian policy, since it involved the interests of one, who happened, at the moment, to be in the dreaded council itself, was disposed of, the

three turned their attention to other matters, with that semblance of indifference to personal feeling, which practice in tortuous paths of state-intrigue enabled men to assume.

“ Since we are so happily of opinion, concerning the disposition of the Donna Violetta,” coolly observed the oldest senator, a rare specimen of hacknied and worldly morality, “ we may look into our list of daily duties—what saith the lion’s mouths to-night ?”

“ A few of the ordinary and unmeaning accusations that spring from personal hatred,” returned another. “ One chargeth his neighbour with oversight in religious duties, and with some carelessness of the fasts of Holy Church—a foolish scandal, fitted for the ears of a curate.”

“ Is there naught else ?”

“ Another complaineth of neglect in a husband. The scrawl is in a woman’s hand, and beareth, on its face, the evidence of a woman’s resentment.”

“ Sudden to rise and easy to be appeased.
Let the neighbourhood quiet the household by
its sneers—What next ?”

“ A suitor in the courts maketh complaint
of the tardiness of the judges.”

“ This toucheth the reputation of St. Mark ;
it must be looked to !”

“ Hold !” interrupted the Signor Gradenigo.
“ The tribunal acteth advisedly—’tis in the
matter of a Hebrew, who is thought to have
secrets of importance The affair hath need of
deliberation, I do assure you.”

“ Destroy the charge—Have we more ?”

“ Nothing of note. The usual number of
pleasantries and hobbling verses which tend to
nothing. If we get some useful gleanings, by
these secret accusations, we gain much nonsense.
I would whip a youngster of ten who could
not mould our soft Italian into better rhyme
than this.”

“ ’Tis the wantonness of security. Let it
pass, for all that serveth to amuse suppresseth

turbulent thoughts. Shall we now see his highness, Signori?"

"You forget the fisherman," gravely observed the Signor Gradenigo.

"Your honour sayeth true. What a head for business hath he! Nothing that is useful escapeth his ready mind."

The old senator, while he was too experienced to be cajoled by such language, saw the necessity of appearing flattered. Again he bowed, and protested aloud and frequently against the justice of compliments that he so little merited. When this little by-play was over, they proceeded gravely to consider the matter before them.

As the decision of the Council of Three will be made apparent in the course of the narrative, we shall not continue to detail the conversation that accompanied their deliberations. The sitting was long, so long indeed that when they arose, having completed

their business, the heavy clock of the square tolled the hour of midnight.

"The doge will be impatient," said one of the two nameless members, as they threw on their cloaks, before leaving the chamber. "I thought his highness wore a more fatigued and feeble air to-day, than he is wont to exhibit, at the festivities of the city?"

"His highness is no longer young, Signore. If I remember right, he greatly outnumbers either of us in years. Our Lady of Loretto lend him strength long to wear the ducal bonnet, and wisdom to wear it well!"

"He hath lately sent offerings to her shrine."

"Signore, he hath. His confessor hath gone in person with the offering, as I know of certainty. 'Tis not a serious gift, but a mere remembrance to keep himself in the odour of sanctity. I doubt that his reign will not be long!"

"There are, truly, signs of decay in his system. He is a worthy prince, and we shall lose a father when called to weep for his loss!"

“Most true, Signore ; but the horned bonnet is not an invulnerable shield against the arrows of death. Age and infirmities are more potent than our wishes.”

“Thou art moody to-night, Signor Gradignio. Thou art not used to be so silent with thy friends.”

“I am not the less grateful, Signore, for their favours. If I have a loaded countenance, I bear a lightened heart. One who hath a daughter of his own so happily bestowed in wedlock as thine, may judge of the relief I feel by this disposition of my ward. Joy affects the exterior, frequently, like sorrow ; ay, even to tears.”

His two companions looked at the speaker with much obvious sympathy in their manners. They then left the chamber of doom together. The menials entered and extinguished the lights, leaving all behind them in an obscurity that was no bad type of the gloomy mysteries of the place.

CHAPTER IV.

“ Then, methought,
A serenade broke silence, breathing hope
Through walls of stone.”

Italy.

NOTWITHSTANDING the lateness of the hour, the melody of music was rife on the water. Gondolas continued to glide along the shadowed canals, while the laugh or the song was echoed among the arches of the palaces. The piazza and piazzetta were yet brilliant with lights, and gay with their multitudes of unwearied revellers.

The habitation of Donna Violetta was far from the scene of general amusement. Though so remote, the hum of the moving throng, and the higher strains of the wind-instruments came, from time to time, to the ears of its inmates, mellowed and thrilling by distance.

The position of the moon cast the whole of the narrow passage which flowed beneath the windows of her private apartments into shadow. In a balcony which overhung the water, stood the youthful and ardent girl, listening with a charmed ear and a tearful eye to one of those soft strains, in which Venetian voices answered to each other from different points on the canals, in the songs of the gondoliers. Her constant companion and mentor was near, while the ghostly father of them both stood deeper in the room.

“There may be pleasanter towns on the main, and capitals of more revelry,” said the charmed Violetta, withdrawing her person from its leaning attitude, as the voices ceased; “but

in such a night and at this witching hour, what city may compare with Venice?"

"Providence hath been less partial in the distribution of its earthly favours than is apparent to a vulgar eye," returned the attentive Carmelite. "If we have our peculiar enjoyments and our moments of divine contemplation, other towns have advantages of their own; Genoa and Pisa, Firenze, Ancona, Roma, Palermo, and, chiefest of all, Napoli—"

"Napoli, father!"

"Daughter, Napoli. Of all the towns of sunny Italy, 'tis the fairest and the most blessed in natural gifts. Of every region I have visited; during a life of wandering and penitence, that is the country on which the touch of the Creator hath been the most God-like!"

"Thou art imaginative to-night, good Father Anselmo. The land must be fair indeed, that can thus warm the fancy of a Carmelite."

"The rebuke is just. I have spoken more under the influence of recollections that came

from days of idleness and levity, than with the chastened spirit of one, who should see the hand of the Maker, in the most simple and least lovely of all his wondrous works."

"You reproach yourself causelessly, holy father," observed the mild Donna Florinda, raising her eyes towards the pale countenance of the monk; "to admire the beauties of nature, is to worship him who gave them being."

At that moment a burst of music rose on the air, proceeding from the water beneath the balcony. Donna Violetta started back, abashed, and as she held her breath in wonder, and haply with that delight which open admiration is apt to excite in a youthful female bosom, the colour mounted to her temples.

"There passeth a band;" calmly observed the Donna Florinda.

"No, it is a cavalier! There are gondoliers, servitors in his colours."

"This is as hardy as it may be gallant;" re-

turned the monk, who listened to the air with an evident and grave displeasure.

There was no longer any doubt but that a serenade was meant. Though the custom was of much use, it was the first time that a similar honour had been paid beneath the window of Donna Violetta. The studied privacy of her life, her known destiny, and the jealousy of the despotic state, and perhaps the deep respect which encircled a maiden of her tender years and high condition, had, until that moment, kept the aspiring, the vain, and the interested, equally in awe.

“It is for me!” whispered the trembling, the distressed, the delighted Violetta.

“It is for one of us, indeed;” answered the cautious friend.

“Be it for whom it may, it is bold,” rejoined the monk.

Donna Violetta shrunk from observation, behind the drapery of the window, but she raised

a hand in pleasure, as the rich strains rolled through the wide apartments.

“What a taste rules the band !” she half-whispered, afraid to trust her voice, lest a sound should escape her ears. “They touch an air of Petrarch’s sonnetas ! How indiscreet, and yet how noble !”

“More noble than wise ;” said the Donna Florinda, who entered the balcony, and looked intently on the water beneath.

“Here are musicians in the colour of a noble in one gondola,” she continued, “and a single cavalier in another.”

“Hath he no servitor ?—Doth he ply the oar himself ?”

“Truly that decency hath not been overlooked ; one in a flowered jacket guides the boat.”

“Speak, then, dearest Florinda, I pray thee.”

“Would it be seemly ?”

“Indeed I think it. Speak them fair. Say that I am the senate’s.—That it is not discreet

to urge a daughter of the state thus—say what thou wilt—but speak them fair.”

“Ha! It is Don Camillo Monforte! I know him by his noble stature and the gallant wave of his hand.”

“This temerity will undo him! His claim will be refused—himself banished. Is it not near the hour when the gondola of the police passes? Admonish him to depart, good Florinda—and yet—can we use this rudeness to a Signor of his rank!”

“Father, counsel us; you know the hazards of this rash gallantry in the Neapolitan—aid us with thy wisdom, for there is not a moment to lose.”

The Carmelite had been an attentive and an indulgent observer of the emotion, which sensations so novel had awakened in the ardent but unpractised breast of the fair Venetian. Pity, sorrow, and sympathy were painted on his mortified face, as he witnessed the mastery of feeling over a mind so guileless, and a heart so

warm, but the look was rather that of one who knew the dangers of the passions, than of one who condemned them, without thought of their origin or power. At the appeal of the governess he turned away and silently quitted the room. Donna Florinda left the balcony and drew near her charge. There was no explanation, nor any audible or visible means of making their sentiments known to each other. Violetta threw herself into the arms of her more experienced friend, and struggled to conceal her face in her bosom. At this moment the music suddenly ceased and the splash of oars, falling into the water, succeeded.

“He is gone!” exclaimed the young creature, who had been the object of the serenade, and whose faculties, spite of her confusion, had lost none of their acuteness. “The gondolas are moving away, and we have not made even the customary acknowledgments for their civility!”

“It is not needed—or rather it might increase a hazard that is already too weighty. Remember

thy high destiny, my child, and let them depart."

"And yet, methinks one of my station should not fail in courtesy. The compliment may mean no more than any other idle usage, and they should not quit us unthanked."

"Rest you, within. I will watch the movement of the boats, for it surpasseth female endurance not to note their aspect."

"Thanks, dearest Florinda ! hasten, lest they enter the other canal ere thou seest them."

The governess was quickly in the balcony. Active as was her movement, her eyes were scarcely cast upon the shadow beneath, before a hurried question demanded what she beheld.

"Both gondolas are gone," was the answer. "That with the musicians is already entering the great canal, but that of the cavalier hath unaccountably disappeared !"

"Nay, look again ; he cannot be in such haste to quit us."

"I had not sought him in the right direction

Here is his gondola, by the bridge of our own canal."

"And the cavalier? He waits for some sign of courtesy; it is meet that we should not withhold it."

"I see him not. His servitor is seated on the steps of the landing, while the gondola appeareth to be empty. The man hath an air of waiting, but I no where see the master!"

"Blessed Maria! can aught have befallen the gallant Duca di Sant' Agata?"

"Nought but the happiness of casting himself here!" exclaimed a voice near the person of the heiress. The Donna Violetta turned her gaze from the balcony, and beheld him who filled all her thoughts, at her feet.

The cry of the girl, the exclamation of her friend, and a rapid and eager movement of the monk, brought the whole party into a groupe.

"This may not be;" said the latter in a reproving voice. "Arise, Don Camillo, lest I re-

pent listening to your prayer; you exceed our conditions."

"As much as this emotion exceedeth my hopes," answered the noble. "Holy father, it is vain to oppose Providence! Providence brought me to the rescue of this lovely being, when accident threw her into the Giudecca, and, once more, Providence is my friend, by permitting me to be a witness of this feeling. Speak, fair Violetta, thou wilt not be an instrument of the senate's selfishness—thou wilt not hearken to their wish of disposing of thy hand on the mercenary, who would trifle with the most sacred of all vows, to possess thy wealth?"

"For whom am I destined?" demanded Violetta.

"No matter, since it be not for me. Some trafficker in happiness, some worthless abuser of the gifts of fortune."

"Thou knowest, Camillo, our Venetian custom, and must see that I am hopelessly in their hands."

“ Arise, Duke of St. Agata,” said the monk, with authority; “ when I suffered you to enter this palace, it was to remove a scandal from its gates, and to save you from your own rash disregard of the state’s displeasure. It is idle to encourage hopes that the policy of the republic opposes. Arise then, and respect your pledges.”

“ That shall be as this lady may decide. Encourage me with but an approving look, fairest Violetta, and not Venice, with its doge and inquisition, shall stir me an inch from thy feet !”

“ Camillo !” answered the trembling girl, “ thou, the preserver of my life, hast little need to kneel to me !”

“ Duke of St. Agata—daughter !”

“ Nay, heed him not, generous Violetta. He utters words of convention—he speaks as all speak in age, when men’s tongues deny the feelings of their youth. He is a Carmelite, and must feign this prudence. He never knew the

tyranny of the passions. The dampness of his cell has chilled the ardour of the heart. Had he been human he would have loved; had he loved he would never have worn a cowl."

Father Anselmo receded a pace, like one pricked in conscience, and the paleness of his ascetic features took a deadly hue. His lips moved as if he would have spoken, but the sounds were smothered by an oppression that denied him utterance. The gentle Florinda saw his distress, and she endeavoured to interpose between the impetuous youth and her charge.

"It may be as you say, Signor Monforte," she said, "and that the Senate, in its fatherly care, searches a partner worthy of an heiress of a house so illustrious and so endowed as that of Tiepolo. But in this, what is there more than of wont? Do not the nobles of all Italy seek their equals in condition and in the gifts of fortune, in order that their union may be fittingly assorted. How know we that the estates of my young friend have not a value in the eye of the

Duke of St. Agata, as well as in those of him that the senate may elect for thy husband !”

“ Can this be true !” exclaimed Violetta.

“ Believe it not ; my errand in Venice is no secret. I seek the restitution of lands and houses long withheld from my family, with honours of the senate that are justly mine. All these do I joyfully abandon for the hope of thy favour.”

“ Thou hearest, Florinda . Don Camillo is not to be distrusted !”

“ What are the senate and the power of St. Mark that they should cross our lives with misery ! Be mine, lovely Violetta, and in the fastnesses of my own good Calabrian castle we will defy their vengeance and policy. Their disappointment shall furnish merriment for my vassals, and our felicity shall make the happiness of thousands. I affect no disrespect for the dignity of the councils, nor any indifference to that I lose, but to me art thou far more pre-

cious than the horned bonnet itself, with all its fancied influence and glory.”

“ Generous Camillo !”

“ Be mine, and spare the cold calculators of the senate another crime. They think to dispose of thee, as if thou wert worthless merchandize, to their own advantage. But thou wilt defeat their design. I read the generous resolution in thine eye, Violetta; thou wilt manifest a will superior to their arts and egotism.”

“ I would not be trafficked for, Don Camillo Monforte, but wooed and won as befitteth a maiden of my condition. They may still leave me liberty of choice. The Signor Gradenigo hath much encouraged me of late with this hope, when speaking of the establishment suited to my years.”

“ Believe him not; a colder heart, a spirit more removed from charity, exists not in Venice. He courts thy favour for his own prodigal son; a cavalier without honour, the companion of

profligates, and the victim of the Hebrews. Believe him not, for he is stricken in deceit."

"He is the victim of his own designs, if this be true. Of all the youths of Venice I esteem Giacomo Gradenigo least."

"This interview must have an end," said the monk, interposing effectually, and compelling the lover to rise. "It would be easier to escape the toils of sin than to elude the agents of the police. I tremble lest this visit should be known, for we are encircled with the ministers of the state, and not a palace in Venice is more narrowly watched than this. Were thy presence here detected, indiscreet young man, thy youth might pine in a prison, while thou wouldst be the cause of persecution and unmerited sorrow to this innocent and inexperienced maiden."

"A prison, sayest thou, father!"

"No less, daughter. Lighter offences are often expiated by heavier judgments, when the pleasure of the senate is thwarted."

The eye of Violetta turned from her governess to her lover, from her lover to the monk, and from the latter to the floor.

“Is thine, Camillo.”

A common cry escaped the Carmelite and the governess.

“Thy mercy, excellent friends,” continued the blushing but decided Violetta. “If I have encouraged Don Camillo, in a manner that thy counsels and maiden modesty would reprove, reflect that had he hesitated to cast himself into the Guidecca, I should have wanted the power to confer this trifling grace. Why should I be less generous than my preserver? No, Camillo, when the senate condemns me to wed another than thee, it pronounces the doom of celibacy; I will hide my griefs in a convent till I die!”

There was a solemn and fearful interruption to a discourse which was so rapidly becoming explicit, by the sound of the bell, that the groom of the chambers, a long tried and confidential domestic, had been commanded to ring before he

entered. As this injunction had been accompanied by another not to appear, unless summoned, or urged by some grave motive, the signal caused a sudden pause, even at that interesting moment.

“How now !” exclaimed the Carmelite to the servant, who abruptly entered. “What means this disregard of my injunctions ?”

“Father, the republic !”

“Is St. Mark in jeopardy, that females and priests are summoned to aid him ?”

“There are officials of the state below, who demand admission in the name of the republic ?”

“This grows serious,” said Don Camillo, who alone retained his self-possession. “My visit is known, and the active jealousy of the state anticipates its object. Summon your resolution, Donna Violetta, and you, father, be of heart ! I will assume the responsibility of the offence, if offence it be, and exonerate all others from censure.”

“Forbid it, Father Anselmo. Dearest Florinda, we will share his punishment !” exclaimed the terrified Violetta, losing all self-command in the fear of such a moment. “He has not been guilty of this indiscretion without participation of mine ; he has not presumed beyond his encouragement.”

The monk and Donna Florinda regarded each other in mute amazement, and haply there was some admixture of feeling in the look that denoted the uselessness of caution when the passions were intent to elude the vigilance of those who were merely prompted by prudence. The former simply motioned for silence, while he turned to the domestic.

“Of what character are these ministers of the state ?” he demanded.

“Father, they are its known officers, and wear the badges of their condition.”

“And their request ?”

“Is to be admitted to the presence of the Donna Violetta.”

“ There is still a hope !” rejoined the monk, breathing more freely. Moving across the room he opened a door which communicated with the private oratory of the palace. “ Retire within this sacred chapel, Don Camillo, while we await the explanation of so extraordinary a visit.”

As time pressed, the suggestion was obeyed on the instant. The lover entered the oratory, and when the door was closed upon his person, the domestic, one known to be worthy of all confidence, was directed to usher in those who waited without.

But a single individual appeared. He was known, at a glance, for a public and responsible agent of the government, who was often charged with the execution of secret and delicate duties. Donna Violetta advanced to meet him, in respect to his employers, and with the return of that self-possession, which long practice interweaves with the habits of the great.

“ I am honoured by this care of my dreaded and illustrious guardians,” she said, making



an acknowledgment for the low reverence with which the official saluted the richest ward of Venice. "To what circumstance do I owe this visit?"

The officer gazed an instant about him, with an habitual and suspicious caution, and then repeating his salutations, he answered.

"Lady," he said, "I am commanded to seek an interview with the daughter of the state, the heiress of the illustrious house of Tiepolo, with the Donna Florinda Mercato, her female companion, with the Father Anselmo, her commissioned confessor, and with any others who enjoy the pleasure of her society and the honour of her confidence."

"Those you seek are here; I am Violetta Tiepolo; to this lady am I indebted for a mother's care, and this reverend Carmelite is my spiritual counsellor. Shall I summon my household?"

"It is unnecessary. My errand is rather of private than of public concern. At the decess

of your late most honoured and much lamented parent, the illustrious senator Tiepolo, the care of your person, lady, was committed by the republic, your natural and careful protector, to the especial guardianship and wisdom of Signore Alessandro Gradenigo, of illustrious birth and estimable qualities."

" Signore, you say true."

" 'Though the parental love of the councils may have seemed to be dormant, it has ever been wakeful and vigilant. Now that the years, instruction, beauty, and other excellences of their daughter, have come to so rare perfection, they wish to draw the ties that unite them nearer, by assuming their own immediate duties about her person."

" By this am I to understand that I am no longer a ward of the Signor Gradenigo?"

" Lady, a ready wit has helped you to the explanation. That illustrious patrician is released from his cherished and well-acquitted duties. To-morrow new guardians will be

charged with the care of your prized person, and will continue their honourable trust, until the wisdom of the senate shall have formed for you such an alliance, as shall not disparage a noble name and qualities that might adorn a throne."

"Am I to be separated from those I love?" demanded Violetta, impetuously.

"Trust to the senate's wisdom. I know not its determination concerning those who have long dwelt with you, but there can be no reason to doubt its tenderness or discretion. I have now only to add, that until those charged anew with the honourable office of your protectors shall arrive, it will be well to maintain the same modest reserve in the reception of visitors as of wont, and that your door, lady, must in propriety be closed against the Signor Gradenigo as against all others of his sex."

"Shall I not even thank him for his care?"

"He is tenfold rewarded in the senate's gratitude"

“ It would have been gracious to have expressed my feelings towards the Signor Gradinigo in words ; but that which is refused to the tongue will be permitted to the pen.”

“ The reserve that becomes the state of one so favoured is absolute. St. Mark is jealous where he loves. And, now my commission is discharged, I humbly take my leave, flattered in having been selected to stand in such a presence, and to have been thought worthy of so honourable a duty.”

As the officer ceased speaking and Violetta returned his bows, she turned her eyes, filled with apprehension, on the sorrowful features of her companions. The ambiguous language of those employed in such missions was too well known to leave much hope for the future. They all anticipated their separation on the morrow, though neither could penetrate the reason of this sudden change in the policy of the state. Interrogation was useless, for the blow evidently came from the secret council, whose motives

could no more be fathomed than its decrees foreseen. The monk raised his hands in silent benediction towards his spiritual charge, and, unable, even in the presence of the stranger, to repress their grief, Donna Florinda and Violetta sunk into each other's arms and wept.

In the mean time the minister of this cruel blow had delayed his departure, like one who had a half-formed resolution. He regarded the countenance of the unconscious Carmelite intently, and in a manner that denoted the habit of thinking much before he decided.

"Reverend Father," he said, "may I crave a moment of your time, for an affair that concerns the soul of a sinner?"

Though amazed, the monk could not hesitate about answering such an appeal. Obedient to a gesture of the officer, he followed him from the apartment, and continued at his side while the other threaded the magnificent rooms and descended to his gondola.

"You must be much honoured of the senate,

holy monk," observed the latter while they proceeded, "to hold so near a trust about the person of one in whom the state takes so great an interest?"

"I feel it as such, my son. A life of peace and prayer should have made me friends."

"Men like you, father, merit the esteem they crave. Are you long of Venice?"

"Since the last conclave. I came into the republic as confessor to the late minister from Florence."

"An honourable trust. You have been with us then long enough to know that the republic never forgets a servitor, nor forgives an affront."

"Tis an ancient state, and one whose influence still reaches far and near."

"Have a care of the step. These marbles are treacherous to an uncertain foot."

"Mine is too practised in the descent to be unsteady. I hope I do not now descend these stairs for the last time?"



The minister of the council affected not to understand the question, but he answered as if replying only to the previous observation.

“ ’Tis truly a venerable state,” he said, “ but a little tottering with its years. All who love liberty, father, must mourn to see so glorious a sway on the decline. *Sic transit gloria mundi!* You bare-footed Carmelites do well to mortify the flesh in youth, by which you escape the pains of a decreasing power. One like you can have few wrongs of his younger days to repair?”

“ We are none of us without sin,” returned the monk, crossing himself. “ He who would flatter his soul with being perfect lays the additional weight of vanity on his life.”

“ Men of my occupation, holy Carmelite, have few opportunities of looking into themselves, and I bless the hour that hath brought me into company so godly. My gondola waits—will you enter?”

The monk regarded his companion in distrust,

it knowing the uselessness of resistance, he murmured a short prayer and complied. A strong dash of the oars announced their departure from the steps of the palace.

CHAPTER V.

O pescator ! dell' onda,
 Fi da lin ;
O pescator ! dell' onda,
 Fi da lin :
Vien pescar in qua,
Colla bella tua barca,
Colla bella se ne va,
Fi da lin, lin, la—

Venetian Boat Song.

THE moon was at the height. Its rays fell in a flood on the swelling domes and massive roofs of Venice, while the margin of the town was brilliantly defined by the glittering bay. The natural and gorgeous setting was more than worthy of that picture of human magnificence ; for at the moment, rich as was the queen of the

Adriatic in her works of art, the grandeur of her public monuments, the number and splendour of her palaces, and most else that the ingenuity and ambition of man could attempt, she was but secondary in the glories of the hour.

Above was the firmament, gemmed with worlds, and sublime in immensity. Beneath lay the broad expanse of the Adriatic, endless to the eye, tranquil as the vault it reflected, and luminous with its borrowed light. Here and there a low island, reclaimed from the sea by the patient toil of a thousand years, dotted the Lagunes, burthened with the groupe of some conventual dwellings, or picturesque with the modest roofs of a hamlet of the fishermen. Neither oar, nor song, nor laugh, nor flap of sail, nor jest of mariner, disturbed the stillness. All in the near view was clothed in midnight loveliness, and all in the distance bespoke the solemnity of nature at peace. The city and the Lagunes, the gulf and the dreamy Alps, the

interminable plain of Lombardy, and the blue void of heaven, lay alike, in a common and grand repose.

There suddenly appeared a gondola. It issued from among the watery channels of the town, and glided upon the vast bosom of the bay, noiseless as the fancied progress of a spirit. A practised and nervous arm guided its movement, which was unceasing and rapid. So swift indeed was the passage of the boat, as to denote pressing haste on the part of the solitary individual it contained. It held the direction of the Adriatic, steering between one of the more southern outlets of the bay and the well known island of St. Giorgio. For half an hour the exertions of the gondolier were unrelaxed, though his eye was often cast behind him, as if he distrusted pursuit; and as often did he gaze a-head, betraying an anxious desire to reach some object that was yet invisible. When a wide reach of water lay between him and the town, however, he permitted his oar to rest, and he

lent all his faculties to a keen and anxious search.

A small dark spot was discovered on the water still nearer to the sea. The oar of the gondolier dashed the element behind him, and his boat again glided away, so far altering its course as to shew that all indecision was now ended. The darker spot was shortly beheld quivering in the rays of the moon, and it soon assumed the form and dimensions of a boat at anchor. Again the gondolier ceased his efforts, and he leaned forward, gazing intently at this undefined object, as if he would aid his powers of sight by the sympathy of his other faculties. Just then the notes of music came softly across the Lagunes. The voice was feeble even to trembling, but it had the sweetness of tone and the accuracy of execution which belong so peculiarly to Venice. It was the solitary man, in the distant boat, indulging in the song of a fisherman. The strains were sweet, and the intonations plaintive to melancholy. The air was

common to all who plied the oar in the canals, and familiar to the ears of the listener. He waited until the close of a verse had died away, and then he answered with a strain of his own. The alternate parts were thus maintained until the music ceased, by the two singing a final verse in chorus.

When the song was ended, the oar of the gondolier stirred the water again, and he was quickly by the other's side.

"Thou art busy with thy hook betimes, Antonio," said he who had just arrived, as he stepped into the boat of the old fisherman already so well known to the reader. "There are men, that an interview with the Council of Three, would have sent to their prayers and a sleepless bed."

"There is not a chapel in Venice, Jacopo, in which a sinner may so well lay bare his soul as in this. I have been here on the empty Lagunes, alone with God, having the gates of Paradise open before my eyes."

“ One like thee hath no need of images to quicken his devotion.”

“ I see the image of my Saviour, Jacopo, in those bright stars, that moon, the blue heavens, the misty bank of mountain, the waters on which we float, ay, even in my own sinking form, as in all which has come from his wisdom and power. I have prayed much since the moon has risen.”

“ And is habit so strong in thee, that thou thinkest of God and thy sins, while thou anglest ?”

“ The poor must toil and the sinful must pray. My thoughts have dwelt so much of late on the boy, that I have forgotten to provide myself with food. If I fish later or earlier than common, 'tis because a man cannot live on grief.”

“ I have bethought me of thy situation, honest Antonio; here is that which will support life and raise thy courage. See,” added the Bravo, stretching forth an arm into his own

gondola, from which he drew a basket, "here is bread from Dalmatia, wine of Lower Italy, and figs from the Levant—eat, then, and be of cheer."

The fisherman threw a wistful glance at the viands, for hunger was making powerful appeals to the weakness of nature, but his hand did not relinquish its hold of the line, with which he still continued to angle.

"And these are thy gifts, Jacopo?" he asked, in a voice that, spite of his resignation, betrayed the longings of appetite.

"Antonio, they are the offerings of one who respects thy courage and honours thy nature."

"Bought with his earnings?"

"Can it be otherwise!—I am no beggar, for the love of the saints, and few in Venice give unasked. Eat then, without fear; seldom wilt thou be more welcome."

"Take them away, Jacopo, if thou lovest me. Do not tempt me beyond what I can bear."

“How! art thou commanded to do a penance?” hastily exclaimed the other.

“Not so—not so. It is long since I have found leisure or heart for the confessional.”

“Then why refuse the gift of a friend? Remember thy years and necessities.”

“I cannot feed on the price of blood!”

The hand of the Bravo was withdrawn, as if repelled by an electric touch. The action caused the rays of the moon to fall athwart his kindling eye, and firm as Antonio was in honesty and principle, he felt the blood creep to his heart, as he encountered the fierce and sudden glance of his companion. A long pause succeeded, during which the fisherman diligently plied his line, though utterly regardless of the object for which it had been cast.

“I have said it, Jacopo,” he added, at length, “and tongue of mine shall not belie the thought of my heart. Take away thy food then, and forget all that is past; for what I have said hath not been said in scorn, but out of regard



to my own soul. Thou knowest how I have sorrowed for the boy, but next to his loss I could mourn over thee—ay, more bitterly than over any other of the fallen !”

The hard breathing of the Bravo was audible, but still he spoke not.

“ Jacopo,” continued the anxious fisherman, “ do not mistake me. The pity of the suffering and poor is not like the scorn of the rich and worldly. If I touch a sore I do not bruise it with my heel. Thy present pain is better than the greatest of all thy former joys.”

“ Enough, old man,” said the other in a smothered voice ; “ thy words are forgotten. Eat without fear, for the offering is bought with earnings pure as the gleanings of a mendicant friar.”

“ I will trust to the kindness of St. Anthony and the fortune of my hook ;” simply returned Antonio. “ ’Tis common for us of the Lagunes to go to a supperless bed : take away the basket, good Jacopo, and let us speak of other things.”

The Bravo ceased to press his food upon the fisherman. Laying aside his basket, he sate brooding over what had occurred.

“Hast thou come thus far for nought else, good Jacopo?” demanded the old man, willing to weaken the shock of his refusal.

The question appeared to restore Jacopo to a recollection of his errand. He stood erect, and looked about him, for more than a minute, with a keen eye and an entire intentness of purpose. The look in the direction of the city was longer and more earnest than those thrown toward the sea and the main, nor was it withdrawn, until an involuntary start betrayed equally surprise and alarm.

“Is there not a boat, here, in a line with the tower of the Campanile?” he asked quickly, pointing towards the city.

“It so seems. It is early for my comrades to be abroad, but the draughts have not been heavy of late, and the revelry of yesterday drew many of our people from their toil. The pa-

tricians must eat, and the poor must labour, or both would die."

The Bravo slowly seated himself, and he looked with concern into the countenance of his companion.

"Art thou long here, Antonio?"

"But an hour. When they turned us away from the palace, thou knowest that I told thee of my necessities. There is not, in common, a more certain spot on the Lagunes than this, and yet have I long played the line in vain. The trial of hunger is hard, but, like all other trials, it must be borne. I have prayed to my patron thrice, and sooner or later he will listen to my wants. Thou art used to the manners of these masked nobles, Jacopo; dost thou think them likely to hearken to reason? I hope I did the cause no wrong for want of breeding, but I spoke them fair and plainly, as fathers and men with hearts."

"As senators they have none. Thou little understandest, Antonio, the distinctions of these

patricians. In the gaiety of their palaces, and among the companions of their pleasures, none will speak you fairer of humanity and justice—ay—even of God ! but when met to discuss what they call the interests of St. Mark, there is not a rock on the coldest peak of yonder Alp, with less humanity, or a wolf among their vallies more heartless !”

“ Thy words are strong, Jacopo—I would not do injustice even to those who have done me this wrong. The senators are men, and God has given all feelings and nature alike.”

“ The gift is then abused. Thou hast felt the want of thy daily assistant, fisherman, and thou hast sorrowed for thy child ; for thee it is easy to enter into another’s griefs ; but the senators know nothing of suffering. Their children are not dragged to the gallies, their hopes are never destroyed by laws coming from hard task-masters, nor are their tears shed for sons ruined by being made companions of the dregs of the republic. They will talk of public

virtue and services to the state, but in their own cases they mean the virtue of renown, and services that bring with them honours and rewards. The wants of the state is their conscience, though they take heed those wants shall do themselves no harm."

"Jacopo, Providence itself hath made a difference in men. One is large, another small; one weak, another strong; one wise, another foolish. At what Providence hath done, we should not murmur!"

"Providence did not make the senate; 'tis an invention of man. Mark me, Antonio, thy language hath given offence, and thou art not safe in Venice. They will pardon all but complaints against their justice. That is too true to be forgiven."

"Can they wish to harm one who seeks his own child?"

"If thou wert great and respected, they would undermine thy fortune and character, ere thou shouldst put their system in danger—as

thou art weak and poor, they will do thee some direct injury, unless thou art moderate. Before all, I warn thee that their system must stand !”

“ Will God suffer this ?”

“ We may not enter into his secrets ;” returned the Bravo, devoutly crossing himself.

“ Did his reign end with this world, there might be injustice in suffering the wicked to triumph, but, as it is, we——Yon boat approaches fast ! I little like its air and movements.”

“ They are not fishermen, truly, for there are many oars and a canopy !”

“ It is a gondola of the state !” exclaimed Jacopo, rising and stepping into his own boat, which he cast loose from that of his companion, when he stood in evident doubt as to his future proceedings. “ Antonio, we should do well to row away.”

“ Thy fears are natural,” said the unmoved fisherman, “ and ’tis a thousand pities that there is cause for them. There is yet time for

one skilful as thou to outstrip the fleetest gondola on the canals."

"Quick, lift thy anchor, old man, and depart,—my eye is sure. I know the boat."

"Poor Jacopo! what a curse is a tender conscience! Thou hast been kind to me in my need, and if prayers, from a sincere heart, can do thee service, thou shalt not want them."

"Antonio!" cried the other, causing his boat to whirl away, and then pausing an instant like a man undecided—"I can stay no longer—trust them not—they are false as fiends—there is no time to lose—I must away."

The fisherman murmured an ejaculation of pity, as he waved a hand, in adieu!

"Holy St. Anthony, watch over my own child, lest he come to some such miserable life!" he added, in an audible prayer—"There hath been good seed cast on a rock, in that youth, for a warmer or kinder heart is not in man. That one like Jacopo should live by striking the assassin's blow!"

The near approach of the strange gondola, now attracted the whole attention of the old man. It came swiftly towards him, impelled by six strong oars, and his eye turned feverishly in the direction of the fugitive. Jacopo, with a readiness that necessity and long practice rendered nearly instinctive, had taken a direction which blended his wake in a line with one of those bright streaks that the moon drew on the water, and which by dazzling the eye, effectually concealed the objects within its width. When the fisherman saw that the Bravo had disappeared, he smiled and seemed at ease.

“ Ay, let them come here,” he said ; “ it will give Jacopo more time. I doubt not the poor fellow hath struck a blow, since quitting the palace, that the council will not forgive ! The sight of gold hath been too strong, and he hath offended those who have so long borne with him. God forgive me, that I have had communion with such a man ! but when the



heart is heavy, the pity of even a dog will warm our feelings. Few care for me, now, or the friendship of such as he could never have been welcome."

Antonio ceased, for the gondola of the state came with a rushing noise to the side of his own boat, where it was suddenly stopped by a backward sweep of the oars. The water was still in ebullition, when a form passing into the gondola of the fisherman, the larger boat shot away again, to the distance of a few hundred feet, and remained at rest.

Antonio witnessed this movement in silent curiosity; but when he saw the gondoliers of the state lying on their oars, he glanced his eye again furtively in the direction of Jacopo, saw that all was safe, and faced his companion with confidence. The brightness of the moon enabled him to distinguish the dress and aspect of a bare-footed Carmelite. The latter seemed more confounded than his companion, by the rapidity of the movement, and the novelty of

his situation. Notwithstanding his confusion, however, an evident look of wonder crossed his mortified features when he first beheld the humble condition, the thin and whitened locks, and the general air and bearing of the old man with whom he now found himself.

“ Who art thou ?” escaped him, in the impulse of surprise.

“ Antonio of the Lagunes ! A fisherman that owes much to St. Anthony, for favours little deserved.”

“ And why hath one like thee fallen beneath the senate’s displeasure !”

“ I am honest and ready to do justice to others. If that offend the great, they are men more to be pitied than envied.”

“ The convicted are always more disposed to believe themselves unfortunate than guilty. The error is fatal, and it should be eradicated from the mind, lest it lead to death.”

“ Go tell this to the patricians. They have

need of plain counsel, and a warning from the church."

"My son, there is pride and anger, and a perverse heart in thy replies. The sins of the senators—and as they are men, they are not without spot—can in no manner whiten thine own. Though an unjust sentence should condemn one to punishment, it leaves the offences against God in their native deformity. Men may pity him who hath wrongfully undergone the anger of the world, but the church will only pronounce pardon on him who confesseth his errors, with a sincere admission of their magnitude."

"Have you come, father, to shrive a penitent?"

"Such is my errand. I lament the occasion, and if what I fear be true, still more must I regret that one so aged should have brought his devoted head beneath the arm of justice."

Antonio smiled, and again he bent his eyes along that dazzling streak of light, which had

swallowed up the gondola and the person of the Bravo.

“Father,” he said, when a long and earnest look was ended, “there can be little harm in speaking truth to one of thy holy office. They have told thee there was a criminal here in the Lagunes, who hath provoked the anger of St. Mark?”

“Thou art right.”

“It is not easy to know when St. Mark is pleased, or when he is not,” continued Antonio, playing his line with indifference, “for the very man he now seeks has he long tolerated; ay, even in presence of the doge. The senate hath its reasons which lie beyond the reach of the ignorant, but it would have been better for the soul of the poor youth, and more seemly for the republic, had it turned a discouraging countenance on his deeds from the first.”

“Thou speakest of another!—thou art not then the criminal they seek?”



“ I am a sinner, like all born of woman, reverend Carmelite, but my hand hath never held any other weapon than the good sword with which I struck the infidel. There was one lately here, that I grieve to add, cannot say this !”

“ And he is gone ?”

“ Father, you have your eyes, and you can answer that question for yourself. He is gone ; though he is not far ; still is he beyond the reach of the swiftest gondola in Venice, praised be St. Mark !”

The Carmelite bowed his head, where he was seated, and his lips moved, either in prayer or in thanksgiving.

“ Are you sorry, monk, that a sinner has escaped ?”

“ Son, I rejoice that this bitter office hath passed from me, while I mourn that there should be a spirit so depraved as to require it. Let us summon the servants of the republic, and inform them that their errand is useless.”

“Be not of haste, good father. The night is gentle, and these hirelings sleep on their oars, like gulls in the Lagunes. The youth will have more time for repentance, should he be undisturbed.”

The Carmelite, who had arisen, instantly re-seated himself, like one actuated by a strong impulse.

“I thought he had already been far beyond pursuit,” he muttered, unconsciously apologizing for his apparent haste.

“He is over bold, and I fear he will row back to the canals, in which case you might meet nearer to the city—or, there may be more gondolas of the state out—in short, father, thou wilt be more certain to escape hearing the confession of a Bravo, by listening to that of a fisherman, who has long wanted an occasion to acknowledge his sins.”

Men who ardently wish the same result, require few words to understand each other. The Carmelite took, intuitively, the meaning of his

companion, and throwing back his cowl, a movement that exposed the countenance of Father Anselmo, he prepared to listen to the confession of the old man.

“Thou art a christian, and one of thy years hath not to learn the state of mind that becometh a penitent;” said the monk, when each was ready.

“I am a sinner, Father; give me counsel and absolution, that I may have hope.”

“Thy will be done—thy prayer’s heard—approach and kneel.”

Antonio, who had fastened his line to his seat, and disposed of his net with habitual care, now crossed himself devoutly, and took his station before the Carmelite. His acknowledgments of error then began. Much mental misery clothed the language and ideas of the fisherman with a dignity that his auditor had not been accustomed to find in men of his class. A spirit so long chastened by suffering had become elevated and noble. He related his hopes for the

boy, the manner in which they had been blasted by the unjust and selfish policy of the state, of his different efforts to procure the release of his grandson, and his bold expedients at the regatta, and the fancied nuptials with the Adriatic. When he had thus prepared the Carmelite to understand the origin of the sinful passions, which it was now his duty to expose, he spoke of those passions themselves, and of their influence on a mind that was ordinarily at peace with mankind. The tale was told simply and without reserve, but in a manner to inspire respect, and to awaken powerful sympathy in him who heard it.

“ And these feelings thou didst indulge against the honoured and powerful of Venice !” demanded the monk, affecting a severity he could not feel.

“ Before my God do I confess the sin ! In bitterness of heart I cursed them ; for to me they seemed men without feeling for the poor,

and heartless as the marbles of their own palaces."

"Thou knowest that to be forgiven, thou must forgive. Dost thou, at peace with all of earth, forget this wrong, and canst thou in charity with thy fellows, pray to Him who died for the race, in behalf of those who have injured thee?"

Antonio bowed his head on his naked breast, and he seemed to commune with his soul.

"Father," he said, in a rebuked tone, "I hope I do."

"Thou must not trifle with thyself to thine own perdition. There is an eye in yon vault above us which pervades space, and which looks into the inmost secrets of the heart. Canst thou pardon the error of the patricians, in a contrite spirit for thine own sins?"

"Holy Maria, pray for them, as I now ask mercy in their behalf!—Father, they are forgiven."

"Amen!"

The Carmelite arose and stood over the kneeling Antonio, with the whole of his benevolent countenance illuminated by the moon. Stretching his arms towards the stars, he pronounced the absolution, in a voice that was touched with pious fervour. The upward expectant eye, with the withered lineaments of the fisherman, and the holy calm of the monk, formed a picture of resignation and hope, that angels would have loved to witness.

“ Amen ! amen ! ” exclaimed Antonio, as he arose, crossing himself ; “ St. Anthony and the Virgin aid me to keep these resolutions ! ”

“ I will not forget thee, my son, in the offices of holy church. Receive my benediction, that I may depart.”

Antonio again bowed his knee, while the Carmelite firmly pronounced the words of peace. When this last office was performed, and a decent interval of mutual but silent prayer had passed, a signal was given to summon the gondola of the state. It came rowing down with

great force, and was instantly at their side. Two men passed into the boat of Antonio, and with officious zeal assisted the monk to resume his place in that of the republic.

“Is the penitent shrived?” half whispered one, seemingly the superior of the two.

“Here is an error. He thou seekest has escaped. This aged man is a fisherman named Antonio, and one who cannot have gravely offended St. Mark. The Bravo hath passed toward the island of San Giorgio, and must be sought elsewhere.”

The officer released the person of the monk, who passed quickly beneath the canopy, and he turned to cast a hasty glance at the features of the fisherman. The rubbing of a rope was audible, and the anchor of Antonio was lifted by a sudden jerk. A heavy plashing of the water followed, and the two boats shot away together, obedient to a violent effort of the crew. The gondola of the state exhibited its usual number of gondoliers bending to their toil, with its dark

and hearse-like canopy, but that of the fisherman was empty !

The sweep of the oars and the plunge of the body of Antonio had been blended in a common wash of the surge. When the fisherman came to the surface, after his fall, he was alone in the centre of the vast but tranquil sheet of water. There might have been a glimmering of hope, as he arose from the darkness of the sea to the bright beauty of that moon-lit night. But the sleeping domes were too far for human strength, and the gondolas were sweeping madly towards the town. He turned, and swimming feebly, for hunger and previous exertion had undermined his strength, he bent his eye on the dark spot, which he had constantly recognized as the boat of the Bravo.

Jacopo had not ceased to watch the interview, with the utmost intentness of his faculties. Favoured by position, he could see without being distinctly visible. He saw the Carmelite pronouncing the absolution, and he witnessed the

approach of the larger boat. He heard a plunge heavier than that of falling oars, and he saw the gondola of Antonio towing away empty. The crew of the republic had scarcely swept the Lagunes with their oar-blades, before his own stirred the water.

“ Jacopo ! — Jacopo ! ” came fearfully and faintly to his ears.

The voice was known and the occasion thoroughly understood. The cry of distress was succeeded by the rush of the water, as it piled before the beak of the Bravo's gondola. The sound of the parted element was like the sighing of a breeze. Ripples and bubbles were left behind, as the driven scud floats past the stars, and all those muscles which had once before that day been so finely developed in the race of the gondoliers, were now expanded, seemingly in twofold volumes. Energy and skill were in every stroke, and the dark spot came down the streak of light, like the swallow touching the water with its wing.

“ Hither, Jacopo—thou steerest wide !”

The beak of the gondola turned, and the glaring eye of the Bravo caught a glimpse of the fisherman’s head.

“ Quickly, good Jacopo,—I fail !”

The murmuring of the water again drowned the stifled words. The efforts of the oar were frenzied, and at each stroke the light gondola appeared to rise from its element.

“ Jacopo—hither—dear Jacopo !”

“ The mother of God aid thee, fisherman !—
I come.”

“ Jacopo—the boy !—the boy !”

The water gurgled ; an arm was visible in the air, and it disappeared. The gondola drove upon the spot where the limb had just been visible, and a backward stroke, that caused the ashen blade to bend like a reed, laid the trembling boat motionless. The furious action threw the Lagune into ebullition, but, when the foam subsided, it lay calm as the blue and peaceful vault it reflected.

“Antonio!”—burst from the lips of the Bravo.

A frightful silence succeeded the call. There was neither answer nor human form. Jacopo compressed the handle of his oar with fingers of iron, and his own breathing caused him to start. On every side he bent a frenzied eye, and on every side he beheld the profound repose of that treacherous element which is so terrible in its wrath. Like the human heart, it seemed to sympathize with the tranquil beauty of the midnight view; but, like the human heart, it kept its own fearful secrets.

CHAPTER VI.

“ Yet a few days and dream-perturbed nights,
And I shall slumber well—but where?—no matter.
Adieu, my Angiolina.”

Marino Faliero.

WHEN the Carmelite re-entered the apartment of Donna Violetta his face was covered with the hue of death, and his limbs with difficulty supported him to a chair. He scarcely observed that Don Camillo Monforte was still present, nor did he note the brightness and joy which glowed in the eyes of the ardent Violetta.

Indeed his appearance was at first unseen by the happy lovers, for the Lord of St. Agata had succeeded in wresting the secret from the breast of his mistress, if that may be called a secret which Italian character had scarcely struggled to retain, and he had crossed the room before even the more tranquil look of the Donna Florinda rested on his person.

“Thou art ill!” exclaimed the governess.
“Father Anselmo hath not been absent without grave cause!”

The monk threw back his cowl for air, and the act discovered the deadly paleness of his features. But his eye, charged with a meaning of horror, rolled over the faces of those who drew around him, as if he struggled with memory to recal their persons.

“Ferdinando! Father Anselmo!” cried the Donna Florinda, correcting the unbidden familiarity, though she could not command the anxiety of her rebel features; “Speak to us—thou art suffering!”

“ Ill at heart, Florinda.”

“ Deceive us not—haply thou hast more evil tidings—Venice—”

“ Is a fearful state !”

“ Why hast thou quitted us—why, in a moment of so much importance to our pupil—a moment that may prove of the last influence on her happiness—hast thou been absent for a long hour ?”

Violetta turned a surprised and unconscious glance towards the clock, but she spoke not.

“ The servants of the state had need of me ;” returned the monk, easing the pain of his spirit by a groan.

“ I understand thee, Father ;—thou hast shrived a penitent ?”

“ Daughter, I have ; and fewer depart more at peace with God and their fellows !”

Donna Florinda murmured a short prayer for the soul of the dead, piously crossing herself as she concluded. Her example was imitated by her pupil, and even the lips of Don Ca-

millio moved, while his head was bowed by the side of his fair companion, in seeming reverence.

“ ’Twas a just end, Father ?” demanded Donna Florinda.

“ It was an unmerited one !” cried the monk, with fervour, “ or there is no faith in man. I have witnessed the death of one who was better fitted to live, as happily he was better fitted to die, than those who pronounced his doom. What a fearful state is Venice !”

“ And such are they who are masters of thy person, Violetta,” said Don Camillo : “ to these midnight murderers will thy happiness be consigned ! Tell us, Father, does thy sad tragedy touch in any manner on the interests of this fair being ? for we are encircled here by mysteries that are as incomprehensible, while they are nearly as fearful, as fate itself.”

The monk looked from one to the other, and a more human expression began to appear in his countenance.

“Thou art right,” he said; “such are the men who mean to dispose of the person of our pupil. Holy St. Mark, pardon the prostitution of his revered name, and shield her with the virtue of his prayers!”

“Father, are we worthy to know more of that thou hast witnessed?”

“The secrets of the confessional are sacred, my son; but this hath been a disclosure to cover the living, and not the dead, with shame.”

“I see the hand of those up above in this!” for so most spoke of the Council of Three. “They have tampered with my right, for years, to suit their selfish purposes, and, to my shame must I own it, they have driven me to a submission, in order to obtain justice, that as ill accords with my feelings as with my character.”

“Nay, Camillo, thou art incapable of this injustice to thyself!”

“’Tis a fearful government, dearest, and its fruits are equally pernicious to the ruler and

the subject. It hath, of all other dangers the greatest, the curse of secrecy on its intentions, its acts, and its responsibilities !”

“ Thou sayest true, my son ; there is no security against oppression and wrong in a state, but the fear of God, or the fear of man. Of the first, Venice hath none, for too many souls share the odium of her sins ; and as for the last, her deeds are hid from their knowledge.”

“ We speak boldly for those who live beneath her laws,” observed Donna Florinda, glancing a look timidly around her. “ As we can neither change nor amend the practices of the state, better that we should be silent.”

“ If we cannot alter the power of the councils we may elude it,” hastily answered Don Camillo, though he too dropped his voice, and assured himself of their security, by closing the casement, and casting his eyes towards the different doors of the room. “ Are you assured of the fidelity of the menials, Donna Florinda ?”

“ Far from it, Signore ; we have those who are

of ancient service and of tried character ; but we have those who were named by the senator, Gradenigo, and, who are doubtless no other than the agents of the state."

" In this manner do they pry into the privacy of all ! I am compelled to entertain, in my palace, varlets that I know to be their hirelings ; and yet do I find it better to seem unconscious of their views, lest they environ me in a manner that I cannot even suspect. Think you, Father, that my presence here hath escaped the spies ?"

" It would be to hazard much were we to rely on such security. None saw us enter, as I think, for we used the secret gate and the more private entrance ; but who is certain of being unobserved when every fifth eye is that of a mercenary !"

The terrified Violetta laid her hand on the arm of her lover.

" Even now, Camillo," she said, " thou mayest be observed, and secretly devoted to punishment !"

“ If seen, doubt it not : St. Mark will never pardon so bold an interference with his pleasure. And yet, sweetest Violetta, to gain thy favour, this risk is nothing ; nor will a far greater hazard turn me from my purpose.”

“ These inexperienced and confiding spirits have taken advantage of my absence to communicate more freely than was discreet ;” said the Carmelite, in the manner of one who foresaw the answer.

“ Father, nature is too strong for the weak preventives of prudence.”

The brow of the monk became clouded. His companions watched the workings of his mind, as they appeared in a countenance that in common was so benevolent, though always sad. For a few moments none broke the silence.

The Carmelite at length demanded, raising his troubled look to the countenance of Don Camillo—

“ Hast thou duly reflected on the consequences of this rashness, son ? What dost thou

propose, in thus braving the anger of the republic, and in setting at defiance her arts, her secret means of intelligence, and her terrors?"

"Father, I have reflected as all of my years reflect, when in heart and soul they love. I have brought myself to feel that any misery would be happiness compared to the loss of Violetta, and that no risk can exceed the reward of gaining her favour. Thus much for the first of thy questions—for the last, I can only say that I am too much accustomed to the wiles of the senate to be a novice in the means of counteracting them."

"There is but one language for youth, when seduced by that pleasing delusion which paints the future with hues of gold. Age and experience may condemn it, but the weakness will continue to prevail in all, until life shall appear in its true colours. Duke of Sant' Agata, though a noble of high lineage and illustrious name, and though lord of many vassals, thou art not a power—thou canst not declare thy



palace in Venice a fortress, nor send a herald to the doge with defiance."

"True, reverend monk; I cannot do this; nor would it be well for him who could, to trust his fortune on so reckless a risk. But the states of St. Mark do not cover the earth—we can fly."

"The senate hath a long arm; and it hath a thousand secret hands."

"None know it better than I; still it does no violence without motive; the faith of their ward irretrievably mine, the evil, as respects them, becomes irreparable."

"Think'st thou so! Means would quickly be found to separate you. Believe not that Venice would be thwarted of its designs so easily; the wealth of a house like this would purchase many an unworthy suitor, and thy right would be disregarded, or haply denied."

"But, Father, the ceremony of the church may not be despised!" exclaimed Violetta; "it comes from heaven and is sacred."

"Daughter, I say it with sorrow, but the

great and the powerful find means even to set aside that venerable and holy sacrament. Thine own gold would serve to seal thy misery."

"This might arrive, Father, were we to continue within the grasp of St. Mark," interrupted the Neapolitan; "but once beyond his borders, 'twould be a bold interference with the right of a foreign state to lay hands on our persons. More than this, I have a castle, in St. Agata, that will defy their most secret means, until events might happen which should render it more prudent for them to desist than to persevere."

"This reason hath force wert thou within the walls of St. Agata, instead of being, as thou art, among the canals."

"Here is one of Calabria, a vassal born of mine, a certain Stefano Milano, the padrone of a Sorrentine feluca, now lying in the port; the man is in strict amity with my own gondolier—he who was third in this day's race. Art thou ill, Father, that thou appearest troubled?"

"Proceed with thy expedient," answered the

monk, motioning that he wished not to be observed.

“ My faithful Gino reports that this Stefano is on the canals, on some errand of the republic, as he thinks, for though the mariner is less disposed to familiarity than is wont, he hath let drop hints that lead to such a conclusion—the feluca is ready, from hour to hour, to put upon the sea, and doubt not the padrone would rather serve his natural lord than these double-dealing miscreants of the senate. I can pay as well as they, if served to my pleasure; and I can punish too, when offended.”

“ There is reason in this, Signore, wert thou beyond the wiles of this mysterious city. But in what manner canst thou embark, without drawing the notice of those, who doubtless watch our movements, on thy person?”

“ There are maskers on the canals at all hours, and if Venice be so impertinent in her system of watchfulness, thou knowest, Father, that, without extraordinary motive, that disguise

is sacred. Without this narrow privilege, the town would not be habitable a day."

"I fear the result;" observed the hesitating monk, while it was evident, from the thoughtfulness of his countenance, that he calculated the chances of the adventure. "If known and arrested, we are all lost!"

"Trust me, Father, that thy fortune shall not be forgotten, even in that unhappy issue. I have an uncle, as you know, high in the favour of the pontiff, and who wears the scarlet hat. I pledge to you the honour of a cavalier, all my interest with this relative, to gain such intercession from the church as shall weaken the blow to her servant."

The features of the Carmelite flushed, and, for the first time, the ardent young noble observed around his ascetic mouth an expression of worldly pride.

"Thou hast unjustly rated my apprehensions, Lord of St. Agata," he said; "I fear not for myself, but for others. This tender and

lovely child hath not been confided to my care, without creating a parental solicitude in her behalf, and"—he paused, and seemed to struggle with himself—"I have too long known the mild and womanly virtues of Donna Florinda, to witness, with indifference, her exposure to a near and fearful danger. Abandon our charge, we cannot; nor do I see in what manner, as prudent and watchful guardians, we may in any manner consent to this risk. Let us hope that they who govern will yet consult the honour and happiness of Donna Violetta."

"That were to hope the winged lion would become a lamb, or the dark and soulless senate a community of self-mortifying and godly Carthusians! No, reverend monk, we must seize the happy moment, and none is likely to be more fortunate than this, or trust our hopes to a cold and calculating policy, that disregards all motives but its own object. An hour, nay, half the time, would suffice to apprise the mariner, and ere the morning light, we might see the

domes of Venice sinking into their own hated Lagunes."

"These are the plans of confident youth, quickened by passion. Believe me, son, it is not easy as thou imaginest, to mislead the agents of the police. This palace could not be quitted, the feluca entered, or any one of the many necessary steps hazarded, without drawing upon us their eyes. Hark!—I hear the wash of oars—a gondola is even now at the water-gate!"

Donna Florinda went hastily to the balcony, and as quickly returned to report that she had seen an officer of the republic enter the palace. There was no time to lose, and Don Camillo was again urged to conceal himself in the little oratory. This necessary caution had hardly been observed before the door of the room opened, and the privileged messenger of the senate announced his own appearance. It was the very individual who had presided at the fearful execution of the fisherman, and who

had already announced the cessation of the Signor Gradenigo's powers. His eye glanced suspiciously around the room, as he entered, and the Carmelite trembled in every limb, at the look which encountered his own. But all immediate apprehension vanished, when the usual artful smile, with which he was wont to soften his disagreeable communications, took place of the momentary expression of a vague and an habitual suspicion.

“ Noble lady,” he said, bowing with deference to the rank of her he addressed, “ you may learn by this assiduity, on the part of their servant, the interest which the senate takes in your welfare. Anxious to do you pleasure, and ever attentive to the wishes of one so young, it hath been decided to give you the amusement and variety of another scene, at a season when the canals of our city become disagreeable, from their warmth and the crowds which live in the air. I am sent to request you will make such preparations, as may befit your

convenience during a few months' residence in a purer atmosphere, and that this may be done speedily ; as your journey, always to prevent discomfort to yourself, will commence before the rising of the sun."

" This is short notice, Signore, for a female about to quit the dwelling of her ancestors !"

" St. Mark suffers his love and parental care to overlook the vain ceremonies of form. It is thus the parent dealeth with the child. There is little need of unusual notice, since it will be the business of the government to see all that is necessary despatched to the residence, which is to be honoured with the presence of so illustrious a lady."

" For myself, Signore, little preparation is needed. But I fear the train of servitors, that befit my condition, will require more leisure for their arrangements."

" Lady, that embarrassment hath been foreseen, and to remove it, the council hath decided to supply you with the only attendant



you will require, during an absence from the city which will be so short."

"How, Signore! am I to be separated from my people?"

"From the hired menials of your palace, lady, to be confided to those who will serve your person, from a nobler motive."

"And my maternal friend—my ghostly adviser?"

"They will be permitted to repose from their trusts, during your absence."

An exclamation from Donna Florinda, and an involuntary movement of the monk, betrayed their mutual concern. Donna Violetta suppressed the exhibition of her own resentment, and of her wounded affections, by a powerful effort, in which she was greatly sustained by her pride; but she could not entirely conceal the anguish of another sort, that was seated in her eye.

"Do I understand that this prohibition extends to her, who, in common, serves my person?"

“ Signora, such are my instructions.”

“ Is it expected that Violetta Tiepolo will do these menial offices for herself?”

“ Signora, no. A most excellent and agreeable attendant has been provided for that duty. Annina,” he continued, approaching the door, “ thy noble mistress is impatient to see thee.”

As he spoke the daughter of the wine-seller appeared. She wore an air of assumed humility, but it was accompanied by a secret mien, that betrayed independence of the pleasure of her new mistress.

“ And this damsel is to be my nearest confidant!” exclaimed Donna Violetta, after studying the artful and demure countenance of the girl, a moment, with a dislike she did not care to conceal.

“ Such hath been the solicitude of your illustrious guardians, lady. As the damsel is instructed in all that is necessary, I will intrude no longer, but take my leave, recommending that you improve the hours, which are now few,

between this and the rising sun, that you may profit by the morning breeze in quitting the city."

The officer glanced another look around the room, more, however, through habitual caution than any other reason, bowed, and departed.

A profound and sorrowful silence succeeded. Then the apprehension that Don Camillo might mistake their situation and appear, flashed upon the mind of Violetta, and she hastened to apprize him of the danger, by speaking to the new attendant.

"Thou hast served before this, Annina?" she asked so loud, as to permit the words to be heard in the oratory.

"Never a lady so beautiful and illustrious, Signora. But I hope to make myself agreeable to one that I hear is kind to all around her."

"Thou art not new to the flattery of thy class; go then, and acquaint my ancient attendants with this sudden resolution, that I may not

disappoint the council by tardiness. I commit all to thy care, Annina, since thou knowest the pleasure of my guardians—those without will furnish the means.”

The girl lingered, and her watchful observers noted suspicion and hesitation in her reluctant manner of compliance. She obeyed, however, leaving the room with the domestic Donna Violetta summoned from the ante-chamber. The instant the door was closed behind her, Don Camillo was in the groupe, and the whole four stood regarding each other in a common panic.

“Canst thou still hesitate, Father?” demanded the lover.

“Not a moment, my son, did I see the means of accomplishing flight.”

“How! Thou wilt not then desert me!” exclaimed Violetta, kissing his hands in joy.

“Nor thou, my second mother!”

“Neither,” answered the governess, who possessed intuitive means of comprehending the re-

solutions of the monk; "we will go with thee, love, to the Castle of St. Agata, or to the dungeon of St. Mark."

"Virtuous and sainted Florinda, receive my thanks!" cried the reprieved Violetta, clasping her hands on her bosom, with an emotion in which piety and gratitude were mingled,—
"Camillo, we await thy guidance."

"Refrain," observed the monk,—
"a footstep—thy concealment."

Don Camillo was scarce hid from view, when Annina reappeared. She had the same suspicious manner of glancing her eye around, as the official, and it would seem, by the idle question she put, that her entrance had some other object than the mere pretence which she made of consulting her new mistress's humour in the colour of a robe.

"Do as thou wilt, girl," said Violetta, with impatience; "thou knowest the place of my intended retirement, and canst judge of the fitness of my attire. Hasten thy preparations, that I

be not the cause of delay. Enrico, attend my new maid to the wardrobe."

Annina reluctantly withdrew, for she was far too much practised in wiles not to distrust this unexpected compliance with the will of the council, or not to perceive that she was admitted with displeasure to the discharge of her new duties. As the faithful domestic of Donna Violetta kept at her side, she was fain, however, to submit, and suffered herself to be led a few steps from the door. Suddenly pretending to recollect a new question, she returned with so much rapidity, as to be again in the room, before Enrico could anticipate the intention.

"Daughter, complete thy errands, and forbear to interrupt our privacy," said the monk, sternly.—"I am about to confess this penitent, who may pine long for the consolations of the holy office, ere we meet again. If thou hast not aught urgent, withdraw, ere thou seriously givest offence to the church."

The severity of the Carmelite's tone, and the

commanding, though subdued gleaming of his eye, had the effect to awe the girl. Quailing before his look, and in truth startled at the risk she ran in offending against opinions so deeply seated in the minds of all, and from which her own superstitious habits were far from free, she muttered a few words of apology, and finally withdrew. There was another uneasy and suspicious glance thrown around her, however, before the door was closed. When they were once more alone, the monk motioned for silence to the impetuous Don Camillo, who could scarce restrain his impatience until the intruder departed.

“Son, be prudent,” he said; “we are in the midst of treachery; in this unhappy city none know in whom they can confide.”

“I think we are sure of Enrico,” said the Donna Florinda, though the very doubts she affected not to feel, lingered in the tones of her voice.

“It matters not, daughter.—He is ignorant

of the presence of Don Camillo, and in that we are safe. Duke of Sant' Agata, if you can deliver us from these toils, we will accompany you."

A cry of joy was near bursting from the lips of Violetta, but obedient to the eye of the monk she turned to her lover, as if to learn his decision. The expression of Don Camillo's face was the pledge of his assent. Without speaking, he wrote hastily, with a pencil, a few words on the envelope of a letter, and enclosing a piece of coin in its folds, he moved with a cautious step to the balcony. A signal was given, and all awaited in breathless silence the answer. Presently they heard the wash of the water, caused by the movement of a gondola beneath the window. Stepping forward again, Don Camillo dropped the paper with such precision, that he distinctly heard the fall of the coin in the bottom of the boat. The gondolier scarce raised his eyes to the balcony, but commencing an air

much used on the canals, he swept onward, like one whose duty called for no haste.

"That has succeeded!" said Don Camillo, when he heard the song of Gino. "In an hour my agent will have secured the feluca, and all now depends on our own means of quitting the palace unobserved. My people will await us, shortly, and perhaps 'twould be well to trust openly to our speed in gaining the Adriatic."

"There is a solemn and necessary duty to perform," observed the monk;—"daughters, withdraw to your rooms, and occupy yourselves with the preparation necessary for your flight, which may readily be made to appear as intended to meet the senate's pleasure. In a few minutes I shall summon you hither, again."

Wondering, but obedient, the females withdrew. The Carmelite then made a brief but clear explanation of his intention. Don Camillo listened eagerly, and when the other had done speaking they retired together into the oratory. Fifteen minutes had not passed, before

the monk re-appeared, alone, and touched the bell, which communicated with the closet of Violetta. Donna Florinda and her pupil were quickly in the room.

“Prepare thy mind for the confessional,” said the priest, placing himself, with grave dignity, in that chair which he habitually used, when listening to the self-accusations and failings of his spiritual child.

The brow of Violetta paled and flushed again, as if there lay a heavy sin on her conscience. She turned an imploring look on her maternal monitor, in whose mild features she met an encouraging smile, and then, with a beating heart, though ill-collected for the solemn duty, but with a decision that the occasion required, she knelt on the cushion at the feet of the monk.

The murmured language of Donna Violetta was audible to none but him for whose paternal ear it was intended, and that dread Being whose just anger it was hoped it might lessen. But Don Camillo gazed, through the half-opened door of

the chapel, on the kneeling form, the clasped hands, and the uplifted countenance of the beautiful penitent. As she proceeded with the acknowledgment of her errors, the flush on her cheek deepened, and a pious excitement kindled in those eyes, which he had so lately seen glowing with a very different passion. The ingenuous and disciplined soul of Violetta was not so quickly disburthened of its load of sin as that of the more practised mind of the Lord of Sant' Agata. The latter fancied that he could trace in the movement of her lips the sound of his own name, and a dozen times during the confession, he thought he could even comprehend sentences of which he himself was the subject. Twice the good Father smiled, involuntarily, and at each indiscretion, he laid a hand in affection on the bared head of the suppliant. But Violetta ceased to speak, and the absolution was pronounced, with a fervour that the remarkable circumstances, in which they all stood, did not fail to heighten.

When this portion of his duty was ended, the Carmelite entered the oratory. With steady hands he lighted the candles of the altar, and made the other dispositions for the mass. During this interval Don Camillo was at the side of his mistress, whispering with the warmth of a triumphant and happy lover. The governess stood near the door, watching for the sound of footsteps in the ante-chamber. The monk then advanced to the entrance of the little chapel, and was about to speak, when a hurried step from Donna Florinda arrested his words. Don Camillo had just time to conceal his person within the drapery of a window, before the door opened and Annina entered.

When the preparations of the altar and the solemn countenance of the priest first met her eye, the girl recoiled, with the air of one rebuked. But rallying her thoughts, with that readiness which had gained her the employment she filled, she crossed herself, reverently, and took a place apart, like one who, while she knew

her station, wished to participate in the mysteries of the holy office.

“ Daughter, none who commence this mass with us, can quit the presence, ere it be completed ;” observed the monk.

“ Father, it is my duty to be near the person of my mistress, and it is a happiness to be near it on the occasion of this early matin.”

The monk was embarrassed. He looked from one to the other, in indecision, and was about to frame some pretence to get rid of the intruder, when Don Camillo appeared in the middle of the room.

“ Reverend monk, proceed,” he said ; “ ’tis but another witness of my happiness.”

While speaking, the noble touched the handle of his sword, significantly, with a finger, and cast a look at the half-petrified Annina, which effectually controlled the exclamation that was about to escape her. The monk appeared to understand the terms of this silent compact ; for with a deep voice he commenced the offices of the mass.

The singularity of their situation, the important results of the act in which they were engaged, the impressive dignity of the Carmelite, and the imminent hazard which they all ran of exposure, together with the certainty of punishment for their daring to thwart the will of Venice, if betrayed, caused a deeper feeling, than that which usually pervades a marriage ceremony, to preside at nuptials thus celebrated. The youthful Violetta trembled at every intonation of the solemn voice of the monk, and towards the close, she leaned in helplessness on the arm of the man to whom she had just plighted her vows. The eye of the Carmelite kindled, as he proceeded with the office, however; and, long ere he had done, he had obtained such a command over the feelings of even Annina, as to hold her mercenary spirit in awe. The final union was pronounced, and the benediction given.

“Maria, of pure memory, watch over thy happiness, daughter!” said the monk, for the first time in his life saluting the fair brow of the

weeping bride. —“ Duke of Sant’ Agata, may thy patron hear thy prayers, as thou provest kind to this innocent and confiding child !”

“ Amen !—Ha !—we are not too soon united, my Violetta ; I hear the sound of oars.”

A glance from the balcony assured him of the truth of his words, and rendered it apparent that it had now become necessary to take the most decided step of all. A six-oared gondola, of a size suited to endure the waves of the Adriatic at that mild season, and with a pavilion of fit dimensions, stopped at the water-gate of the palace.

“ I wonder at this boldness !” exclaimed Don Camillo. “ There must be no delay, lest some spy of the republic apprise the police. Away, dearest Violetta—away, Donna Florinda—Father, away !”

The governess and her charge passed swiftly into the inner rooms. In a minute, they returned bearing the caskets of Donna Violetta, and a sufficient supply of necessities, for a

short voyage. The instant they re-appeared all was ready ; for Don Camillo had long held himself prepared for this decisive moment, and the self-denying Carmelite had little need of superfluities. It was no moment for unnecessary explanations or trivial objections.

“ Our hope is in celerity,” said Don Camillo ;
“ secrecy is impossible.”

He was still speaking, when the monk led the way from the room. Donna Florinda and the half-breathless Violetta followed ; Don Camillo drew the arm of Annina under his own, and in a low voice bid her, at her peril, refuse to obey.

The long suite of outer rooms was passed, without meeting a single observer of the extraordinary movement. But when the fugitives entered the great hall, that communicated with the principal stairs, they found themselves in the centre of a dozen menials of both sexes.

“ Place,” cried the Duke of Sant’ Agata, whose person and voice were alike unknown



to them. "Your mistress will breathe the air of the canals."

Wonder and curiosity were alive in every countenance, but suspicion and eager attention were uppermost in the features of many. The foot of Donna Violetta had scarcely touched the pavement of the lower hall, when several menials glided down the flight, and quitted the palace, by its different outlets. Each sought those who had engaged him in the service. One flew along the narrow streets of the islands, to the residence of the Signor Gradenigo; another sought his son; and one, ignorant of the person of him he served, actually searched an agent of Don Camillo, to impart a circumstance in which that noble was himself so conspicuous an actor. To such a pass of corruption had double-dealing and mystery rendered the household of the fairest and richest in Venice! The gondola lay at the marble steps of the water-gate, held against the stones by two of its crew. Don Camillo saw, at a glance, that the masked gondoliers

had neglected none of the precautions he had prescribed, and he inwardly commended their punctuality. Each wore a short rapier at his girdle, and he fancied he could trace beneath the folds of their garments, evidence of the presence of the clumsy fire-arms, in use at that period. These observations were made, while the Carmelite and Violetta entered the boat. Donna Florinda followed, and Annina was about to imitate her example, when she was arrested by the arm of Don Camillo.

"Thy service ends here," whispered the bridegroom. "Seek another mistress; in fault of a better thou mayest devote thyself to Venice."

The little interruption caused Don Camillo to look backward, and, for a single moment, he paused to scrutinize the groupe of eyes that crowded the hall of the palace, at a respectful distance.

"Adieu, my friends!" he added; "Those

among ye who love your mistress shall be remembered."

He would have said more, but a rude seizure of his arms caused him to turn hastily away. He was firm in the grasp of the two gondoliers who had landed. While he was yet in too much astonishment to struggle, Annina, obedient to a signal, darted past him and leaped into the boat. The oars fell into the water; Don Camillo was repelled by a violent shove backward into the hall, the gondoliers stepped lightly into their places, and the gondola swept away from the steps, beyond the power of him they left to follow.

"Gino! — miscreant! — what means this treachery?"

The movement of the parting gondola was accompanied by no other sound than the usual washing of the water. In speechless agony, Don Camillo saw the boat glide, swifter and swifter at each stroke of the oars, along the

canal, and then, whirling round the angle of a palace, disappear.

Venice admitted not of pursuit like another city, for there was no passage along the canal taken by the gondola, but by water. Several of the boats used by the family, lay within the piles on the great canal, at the principal entrance, and Don Camillo was about to rush into one, and to seize its oars, with his own hands, when the usual sounds announced the approach of a gondola from the direction of the bridge, that had so long served as a place of concealment to his own domestic. It soon issued from the obscurity, cast by the shadows of the houses, and proved to be a large gondola pulled, like the one which had just disappeared, by six masked gondoliers. The resemblance between the equipments of the two was so exact, that at first not only the wondering Camillo, but all the others present fancied the latter, by some extraordinary speed, had already made the tour of the adjoining palaces, and was once more ap-

proaching the private entrance of that of Donna Violetta.

“Gino!” cried the bewildered bridegroom.

“Signore mio?” answered the faithful domestic.

“Draw nearer, varlet. What meaneth this idle trifling, at a moment like this?”

Don Camillo leaped a fearful distance, and happily he reached the gondola. To pass the men and to rush into the canopy needed but a moment; to perceive that it was empty was the work of a glance.

“Villains, have you dared to be false!” cried the confounded noble.

At that instant the clock of the city began to tell the hour of two, and it was only as that appointed signal sounded heavy and melancholy on the night-air, that the undeceived Camillo got a certain glimpse of the truth.

“Gino,” he said, repressing his voice, like one summoning a desperate resolution—“Are thy fellows true?”

“As faithful as your own vassals, Signore.”

“And thou didst not fail to deliver the note to my agent?”

“He had it, before the ink was dry, eccellenza.”

“The mercenary villain!—He told thee where to find the gondola, equipped as I see it?”

“Signore, he did; and I will do the man the justice to say that nothing is wanting, either to speed or comfort.”

“Ay, he even deals in duplicates, so tender is his care!” muttered Don Camillo, between his teeth. “Pull away, men; your own safety and my happiness now depend on your arms. A thousand ducats if you equal my hopes—my just anger if you disappoint them!”

Don Camillo threw himself on the cushions as he spoke, in bitterness of heart, though he seconded his words by a gesture which bid the men proceed. Gino, who occupied the stern and managed the directing oar, opened a small

window in the canopy, which communicated with the interior, and bent to take his master's directions as the boat sprang ahead. Rising from his stooping posture, the practised gondolier gave a sweep with his blade, which caused the sluggish element of the narrow canal to whirl in eddies, and then the gondola glided into the great canal, as if it obeyed an instinct.

CHAPTER VII.

"Why liest thou so on the green earth ?

'Tis not the hour of slumber :—why so pale ?"

Cain.

NOTWITHSTANDING his apparent decision, the Duke of Sant' Agata was completely at a loss in what manner to direct his future movements. That he had been duped, by one or more of the agents, to whom he had been compelled to confide his necessary preparations for the flight he had meditated several days, was too certain to admit of his deceiving himself with the hopes, that some unaccountable mistake was



the cause of his loss. He saw, at once, that the senate was master of the person of his bride, and he too well knew its power, and its utter disregard of human obligations, when any paramount interest of the state was to be consulted, to doubt for an instant its willingness to use its advantage, in any manner that was most likely to contribute to its own views. By the premature death of her uncle, Donna Violetta had become the heiress of vast estates in the dominions of the church, and a compliance with that jealous and arbitrary law of Venice, which commanded all of its notables to dispose of any foreign possessions they might acquire, was only suspended on account of her sex, and, as has already been seen, with the hope of disposing of her hand in a manner that would prove more profitable to the republic. With this object still before them, and with the means of accomplishing it in their own hands, the bridegroom well knew that his marriage would not only be denied, but he feared the witnesses

of the ceremony would be so disposed of, as to give little reason ever to expect embarrassment from their testimony. For himself, personally, he felt less apprehension, though he foresaw that he had furnished his opponents with an argument that was likely to defer to an indefinable period, if it did not entirely defeat, his claims to the disputed succession. But he had already made up his mind to this result, though it is probable that his passion for Violetta had not entirely blinded him to the fact, that her Roman signories would be no unequal offset for the loss. He believed that he might possibly return to his palace with impunity, so far as any personal injury was concerned; for the great consideration he enjoyed in his native land, and the high interest he possessed at the court of Rome, were sufficient pledges that no open violence would be done him. The chief reason why his claim had been kept in suspense, was the wish to profit by his near connection with the favourite cardinal, and

though he had never been able entirely to satisfy the ever-increasing demands of the council, in this respect, he thought it probable that the power of the Vatican would not be spared, to save him from any very imminent personal hazard. Still he had given the State of Venice plausible reasons for severity, and liberty, just at that moment, was of so much importance, that he dreaded falling into the hands of the officials, as one of the greatest misfortunes which could momentarily overtake him. He so well knew the crooked policy of those with whom he had to deal, that he believed he might be arrested solely that the government could make an especial merit of his future release, under circumstances of so seeming gravity. His order to Gino, therefore, had been to pull down the principal passage toward the port.

Before the gondola, which sprung at each united effort of its crew, like some bounding animal, entered among the shipping, its master had time to recover his self-possession, and to

form some hasty plans for the future. Making a signal for the crew to cease rowing, he came from beneath the canopy. Notwithstanding the lateness of the hour, boats were plying on the water within the town, and the song was still audible on the canals. But among the mariners a general stillness prevailed, such as befitted their toil during the day, and their ordinary habits.

"Call the first idle gondolier of thy acquaintance hither, Gino," said Don Camillo, with assumed calmness; "I would question him."

In less than a minute he was gratified.

"Hast seen any strongly manned gondola plying, of late, in this part of the canal?" demanded Don Camillo, of the man they had stopped.

"None, but this of your own, Signore; which is the fastest of all that passed beneath the Rialto, in this day's regatta."

"How knowest thou, friend, aught of the speed of my boat?"

“ Signore, I have pulled an oar on the canals of Venice six and twenty years, and I do not remember to have seen a gondola move more swiftly on them than did this very boat but a few minutes ago, when it dashed among the felucas, further down in the port, as if it were again running for the oar. Corpo di Bacco! There are rich wines in the palaces of the nobles, that men can give such life to wood!”

“ Whither did we steer?” eagerly asked Don Camillo.

“ Blessed San Teodoro! I do not wonder, eccellenza, that you ask that question, for though it is but a moment since, here I see you lying as motionless on the water as a floating weed!”

“ Friend, here is silver—addio.”

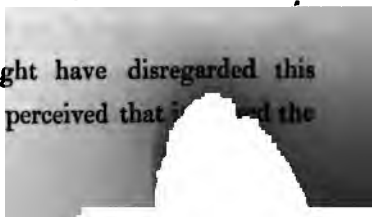
The gondolier swept slowly onward, singing a strain in honour of his bark, while the boat of Don Camillo darted ahead. Mystic, feluca, xebec, brigantine, and three-masted ship, were apparently floating past them, as they shot

through the maze of shipping, when Gino bent forward and drew the attention of his master to a large gondola, which was pulling with a lazy oar toward them, from the direction of the Lido. Both boats were in a wide avenue in the midst of the vessels, the usual track of those who went to sea, and there was no object whatever between them. By changing the course of his own boat, Don Camillo soon found himself within an oar's length of the other. He saw, at a glance, it was the treacherous gondola by which he had been duped.

"Draw, men, and follow!" shouted the desperate Neapolitan, preparing to leap into the midst of his enemies.

"You draw against St. Mark!" cried a warning voice from beneath the canopy. "The chances are unequal, Signore; for the smallest signal would bring twenty galleys to our succour."

Don Camillo might have disregarded this menace, had he not perceived that it was the



half-drawn rapiers of his followers to return into their scabbards.

“Robber !” he answered, “restore her whom you have spirited away.”

“Signore, you young nobles are often pleased to play your extravagancies with the servants of the republic. Here are none but the gondoliers and myself.” A movement of the boat permitted Don Camillo to look into the covered part, and he saw that the other uttered no more than the truth. Convinced of the uselessness of further parley, knowing the value of every moment, and believing he was on a track which might still lead to success, the young Neapolitan signed to his people to go on. The boats parted in silence, that of Don Camillo proceeding in the direction from which the other had just come.

In a short time the gondola of Don Camillo was in an open part of the Guidecca, and entirely beyond the tiers of the shipping. It was so late that the moon had begun to fall, and its light

was cast obliquely on the bay, throwing the eastern sides of the buildings, and the other objects into shadow. A dozen different vessels were seen, aided by the land-breeze, steering towards the entrance of the port. The rays of the moon fell upon the broad surfaces of those sides of their canvass which were nearest to the town, and they resembled so many spotless clouds, sweeping the water and floating seaward.

“They are sending my wife to Dalmatia!” cried Don Camillo, like a man on whom the truth began to dawn.

“Signore mio!” exclaimed the astonished Gino.

“I tell thee, sirrah, that this accursed senate hath plotted against my happiness, and having robbed me of thy mistress, hath employed one of the many felucas that I see, to transport her to some of its strong-holds, on the eastern coast of the Adriatic.”

“Blessed Maria! Signor Duca, and my ho-

noured master ; they say that the very images of stone in Venice have ears, and that the horses of bronze will kick, if an evil word is spoken against those up above."

" Is it not enough, varlet, to draw curses from the meek Job, to rob him of a wife? Hast thou no feeling for thy mistress?"

" I did not dream, eccellenza, that you were so happy as to have the one, or that I was so honoured as to have the other."

" Thou remindest me of my folly, good Gino. In aiding me on this occasion, thou wilt have thy own fortune in view, as thy efforts, like those of all thy fellows, will be made in behalf of the lady to whom I have just plighted a husband's vows."

" San Teodoro help us all, and hint what is to be done ! The lady is most happy, Signor Don Camillo, and if I only knew by what name to mention her, she should never be forgotten in any prayer that so humble a sinner might dare to offer."

“Thou hast not forgotten the beautiful lady I drew from the Guidecca?”

“Corpo di Bacco! Your eccellenza floated like a swan, and swam faster than a gull. Forgotten! Signore, no,—I think of it every time I hear a splash in the canals, and every time I think of it I curse the Ancona-man in my heart. St. Theodore forgive me, if it be unlike a Christian to do so. But, though we all tell marvels of what our Lord did in the Guidecca, the dip of its waters is not the marriage-ceremony, nor can we speak with much certainty of beauty, that was seen to so great disadvantage.”

“Thou art right, Gino.—But that lady, the illustrious Donna Violetta Tiepolo, the daughter and heiress of a famed senator, is now thy mistress. It remains for us to establish her in the Castle of Sant’ Agata, where I shall defy Venice and its agents.”

Gino bowed his head in submission, though he cast a look behind, to make sure that none of

those agents, whom his master set so openly at defiance, were within ear-shot.

In the mean time the gondola proceeded, for the dialogue in no manner interrupted the exertions of Gino, still holding the direction of the Lido. As the land-breeze freshened, the different vessels in sight glided away, and by the time Don Camillo reached the barrier of sand, which separates the Lagunes from the Adriatic, most of them had glided through the passages, and were now shaping their courses, according to their different destinations, across the open gulf. The young noble had permitted his people to pursue the direction originally taken, in pure indecision. He was certain that his bride was in one of the many barks in sight, but he possessed no clue to lead him towards the right one, nor any sufficient means of pursuit, were he even master of that important secret. When he landed, therefore, it was with the simple hope of being able to form some general conjecture as to the portion of the republic's dominions, in which

he might search for her he had lost, by observing to what part of the Adriatic the different felucas held their way. He had determined on immediate pursuit, however, and before he quitted the gondola, he once more turned to his confidential gondolier to give the necessary instructions.

“Thou knowest, Gino,” he said, “that there is one born a vassal on my estates, here in the port, with a feluca from the Sorrentine shore?”

“I know the man better than I know my own faults, Signore, or even my own virtues.”

“Go to him, at once, and make sure of his presence. I have imagined a plan to decoy him into the service of his lord; but I would now know the condition of his vessel.”

Gino said a few words in commendation of the zeal of his friend Stefano, and in praise of the Bella Sorrentina, as the gondola receded from the shore; and then he dashed his oar into the water, like a man in earnest to execute the commission.

There is a lonely spot on the Lido di Paes-trina, where catholic exclusion has decreed that the remains of all who die in Venice, without the pale of the church of Rome, shall moulder into their kindred dust. Though it is not distant from the ordinary landing and the few buildings which line the shore, it is a place that, in itself, is no bad emblem of a hopeless lot. Solitary, exposed equally to the hot airs of the south and the bleak blasts of the Alps, frequently covered with the spray of the Adriatic, and based on barren sands, the utmost that human art, aided by a soil which has been fattened by human remains, can do, has been to create around the modest graves a meagre vegetation, that is in slight contrast to the sterility of most of the bank. This place of interment is without the relief of trees, at the present day it is unenclosed, and, in the opinions of those who have set it apart for heretic and Jew, it is unblest. And yet, though condemned alike to this, the last indignity which man can in-

flict on his fellow, the two proscribed classes furnish a melancholy proof of the waywardness of human passions and prejudice, by refusing to share in common, the scanty pittance of earth, which bigotry has allowed for their everlasting repose! While the protestant sleeps by the side of protestant in exclusive obloquy, the children of Israel moulder apart on the same barren heath, sedulous to preserve, even in the grave, the outward distinctions of faith. We shall not endeavour to seek that deeply-seated principle which renders man so callous to the most eloquent and striking appeals to liberality, but rest satisfied with being grateful that we have been born in a land, in which the interests of religion are as little as possible sullied by the vicious contamination of those of life; in which Christian humility is not exhibited beneath the purple, nor Jewish adhesion by intolerance; in which man is left to care for the welfare of his own soul, and in which, so far as the



human eye can penetrate, God is worshipped for himself.

Don Camillo Monforte landed near the retired graves of the proscribed. As he wished to ascend the low sand-hills, which have been thrown up by the waves and the winds of the gulf, on the outer edge of the Lido, it was necessary that he should pass directly across the condemned spot, or make such a circuit as would have been inconvenient. Crossing himself, with a superstition that was interwoven with all his habits and opinions, and loosening his rapier, in order that he might not miss the succour of that good weapon, at need, he moved across the heath tenanted by the despised dead, taking care to avoid the mouldering heaps of earth which lay above the bones of heretic or Jew. He had not threaded more than half the graves, however, when a human form arose from the grass, and seemed to walk like one who mused on the moral that the piles at his feet would be apt to excite. Again Don Camillo touched the handle

of his rapier ; then moving aside, in a manner to give himself an equal advantage from the light of the moon, he drew near the stranger. His footstep was heard, for the other paused, regarded the approaching cavalier, and folding his arms, as it might be in sign of neutrality, awaited his nearer approach.

“ Thou hast chosen a melancholy hour for thy walk, Signore,” said the young Neapolitan ;
“ and a still more melancholy scene. I hope I do not intrude on an Israelite, or a Lutheran, who mourns for his friend ?”

“ Don Camillo Monforte, I am, like yourself, a Christian.”

“ Ha ! Thou knowest me—’tis Battista, the gondolier that I once entertained in my household ?”

“ Signore, ’tis not Battista.”

As he spoke, the stranger faced the moon, in a manner that threw all of its mild light upon his features.

“ Jacopo !” exclaimed the duke, recoiling, as

did all in Venice habitually, when that speaking eye was unexpectedly met.

“ Signore—Jacopo.”

In a moment the rapier of Don Camillo glittered in the rays of the moon.

“ Keep thy distance, fellow, and explain the motive that hath brought thee thus across my solitude !”

The Bravo smiled, but his arms maintained their fold.

“ I might, with equal justice, call upon the Duke of Sant’ Agata to furnish reasons, why he wanders at this hour among the Hebrew graves.”

“ Nay, spare thy pleasantry ; I trifle not with men of thy reputation ; if any in Venice have thought fit to employ thee against my person, thou wilt have need of all thy courage and skill, ere thou earnest thy fee.”

“ Put up the rapier, Don Camillo ; here is none to do you harm. Think you, if employed in the manner you name, I would be in this spot to seek you ? Ask yourself whether your visit

here was known, or whether it was more than the idle caprice of a young noble, who finds his bed less easy than his gondola. We have met, Duke of Sant' Agata, when you distrusted my honour less."

"Thou speakest true, Jacopo;" returned the noble, suffering the point of his rapier to fall from before the breast of the Bravo, though he still hesitated to withdraw the point. "Thou sayest the truth. My visit to this spot is indeed accidental, and thou couldst not have possibly foreseen it. Why art thou here?"

"Why are these here?" demanded Jacopo, pointing to the graves at his feet. "We are born, and we die—that much is known to us all; but the when and the where are mysteries, until time reveals them."

"Thou art not a man to act without good motive. Though these Israelites could not foresee their visit to the Lido, thine hath not been without intention."

"I am here, Don Camillo Monforte, because

my spirit hath need of room. I want the air of the sea—the canals choke me—I can only breathe in freedom on this bank of sand !”

“ Thou hast another reason, Jacopo ?”

“ Ay, Signore—I loathe yon city of crimes !”

As the Bravo spoke, he shook his hand in the direction of the domes of St. Mark, and the deep tones of his voice appeared to heave up from the depths of his chest.

“ This is extraordinary language for a——”

“ Bravo ; speak the word boldly, Signore—it is no stranger to my ears. But even the stiletto of a Bravo is honourable, compared to that sword of pretended justice which St. Mark wields ! The commonest hireling of Italy—he who will plant his dagger in the heart of his friend for two sequins, is a man of open dealing, compared to the merciless treachery of some yonder town !”

“ I understand thee, Jacopo ; thou art, at length, proscribed. The public voice, faint as it is in the republic, has finally reached the ears

of thy employers, and they withdraw their protection."

Jacopo regarded the noble, for an instant, with an expression so ambiguous, as to cause the latter insensibly to raise the point of his rapier, but when he answered, it was with his ordinary quiet.

"Signor Duca," he said, "I have been thought worthy to be retained by Don Camillo Monforte!"

"I deny it not—and now that thou recallest the occasion, new light breaks in upon me. Villain, to thy faithlessness I owe the loss of my bride!"

Though the rapier was at the very throat of Jacopo, he did not flinch. Gazing at his excited companion, he laughed in a smothered manner, but bitterly.

"It would seem that the Lord of Sant' Agata wishes to rob me of my trade," he said. "Arise, ye Israelites, and bear witness, lest men doubt the fact! A common bravo of the canals is

waylaid, among your despised graves, by the proudest Signor of Calabria ! You have chosen your spot, in mercy, Don Camillo, for sooner or later this crumbling and sea-worn earth is to receive me. Were I to die at the altar itself, with the most penitent prayer of holy church on my lips, the bigots would send my body to rest among these hungry Hebrews and accursed heretics. Yes, I am a man proscribed, and unfit to sleep with the faithful !”

His companion spoke with so strange a mixture of irony and melancholy, that the purpose of Don Camillo wavered. But remembering his loss, he shook the rapier’s point, and continued :—

“Thy taunts and effrontery will not avail thee, knave ;” he cried. “Thou knowest that I would have engaged thee as the leader of a chosen band, to favour the flight of one dear from Venice.”

“Nothing more true, Signore.”

“And thou didst refuse the service ?”

“Noble duke, I did.”

“Not content with this, having learned the particulars of my project, thou sold the secret to the senate?”

“Don Camillo Monforte, I did not. My engagements with the council would not permit me to serve you; else, by the brightest star of yonder vault! it would have gladdened my heart to have witnessed the happiness of two young and faithful lovers. No—no—no; they know me not, who think I cannot find pleasure in the joy of another. I told you that I was the senate’s,—and there the matter ended.”

“And I had the weakness to believe thee, Jacopo, for thou hast a character so strangely compounded of good and evil, and bearest so fair a name for observance of thy faith, that the seeming frankness of the answer lulled me to security. Fellow, I have been betrayed, and that at the moment when I thought success most sure.”

Jacopo manifested interest, but, as he moved

slowly on, accompanied by the vigilant and zealous noble, he smiled coldly, like one who had pity for the other's credulity.

"In bitterness of soul, I have cursed the whole race for its treachery;" continued the Neapolitan.

"This is rather for the priore of St. Mark, than for the ear of one who carries a public stiletto."

"My gondola has been imitated—the liveries of my people copied—my bride stolen.—Thou answerest not, Jacopo?"

"What answer would you have! You have been cozened, Signore, in a state, whose very prince dare not trust his secrets to his wife. You would have robbed Venice of an heiress, and Venice has robbed you of a bride. You have played high, Don Camillo, and have lost a heavy stake. You have thought of your own wishes and rights, while you have pretended to serve Venice with the Spaniard."

Don Camillo started in surprise.

“Why this wonder, Signore?—You forget that I have lived much among those who weigh the chances of every political interest, and that your name is often in their mouths. This marriage is doubly disagreeable to Venice, who has nearly as much need of the bridegroom as of the bride. The council hath long ago forbidden the banns.”

“Ay—but the means?—explain the means by which I have been duped, lest the treachery be ascribed to thee.”

“Signore, the very marbles of the city give up their secrets to the state. I have seen much, and understood much, when my superiors have believed me merely a tool; but I have seen much that even those who employed me could not comprehend. I could have foretold this consummation of your nuptials, had I known of their celebration.”

“This thou couldst not have done, without being an agent of their treachery.”

“The schemes of the selfish may be foretold ;

it is only the generous and the honest that baffle calculation. He who can gain a knowledge of the present interest of Venice is master of her dearest secrets of state ; for what she wishes she will do, unless the service cost too dear. As for the means—how can they be wanting in a household like yours, Signore ?”

“ I trusted none but those deepest in my confidence.”

“ Don Camillo, there is not a servitor in your palace, Gino alone excepted, who is not a hireling of the senate, or of its agents. The very gondoliers, who row you to your daily pleasures, have had their hands crossed with the republic’s sequins. Nay, they are not only paid to watch you, but to watch each other.”

“ Can this be true !”

“ Have you ever doubted it, Signore ?” asked Jacopo, looking up like one who admired at another’s simplicity.

“ I knew them to be false—pretenders to a faith that in secret they mock ; but I had not

believed they dared to tamper with the very menials of my person. This undermining of the security of families is to destroy society at its core !”

“ You talk like one who hath not been long a bridegroom, Signore ;” said the Bravo, with a hollow laugh. “ A year hence, you may know what it is to have your own wife turning your secret thoughts into gold.”

“ And thou servest them, Jacopo ?”

“ Who does not, in some manner suited to his habits ? We are not masters of fortune, Don Camillo, or the Duke of Sant’ Agata would not be turning his influence with a relative, to the advantage of the republic. What I have done hath not been done without bitter penitence, and an agony of soul, that your own light servitude may have spared you, Signore.”

“ Poor Jacopo !”

“ If I have lived through it all, ’tis because one mightier than the state hath not deserted me. But, Don Camillo Monforte, there are

crimes which pass beyond the powers of man to endure."

The Bravo shuddered, and he moved among the despised graves, in silence.

"They have then proved too ruthless even for thee?" said Don Camillo, who watched the contracting eye and heaving form of his companion, in wonder.

"Signore, they have. I have witnessed, this night, a proof of their heartlessness and bad faith, that hath caused me to look forward to my own fate. The delusion is over; from this hour I serve them no longer."

The Bravo spoke with deep feeling, and his companion fancied, strange as it was coming from such a man, with an air of wounded integrity. Don Camillo knew that there was no condition of life, however degraded or lost to the world, which had not its own particular opinions of the faith due to its fellows; and he had seen enough of the sinuous course of the oligarchy of Venice, to understand that it was quite possi-

ble its shameless and irresponsible duplicity might offend the principles of even an assassin. Less odium was attached to men of that class, in Italy and at that day, than will be easily imagined in a country like this ; for the radical defects and the vicious administration of the laws, caused an irritable and sensitive people too often to take into their own hands, the right of redressing their own wrongs. Custom had lessened the odium of the crime, and though society denounced the assassin himself, it is scarcely too much to say, that his employer was regarded with little more disgust than the religious of our time regard the survivor of a private combat. Still it was not usual for nobles like Don Camillo to hold intercourse, beyond that which the required service exacted, with men of Jacopo's cast ; but the language and manner of the Bravo so strongly attracted the curiosity, and even the sympathy of his companion, that the latter unconsciously sheathed his rapier and drew nearer.

“ Thy penitence and regrets, Jacopo, may

lead thee yet nearer to virtue," he said, "than mere abandonment of the senate's service. Seek out some godly priest, and ease thy soul, by confession and prayer."

The Bravo trembled in every limb, and his eye turned wistfully to the countenance of the other.

"Speak, Jacopo; even I will hear thee, if thou wouldst remove the mountain from thy breast."

"Thanks, noble Signore! a thousand thanks for this glimpse of sympathy, to which I have long been a stranger! None know how dear a word of kindness is, as he who has been condemned by all, as I have been. I have prayed—I have craved—I have wept for some ear to listen to my tale, and I thought I had found one who would have heard me without scorn, when the cold policy of the senate struck him. I came here to commune with the hated dead, when chance brought us together. Could I—"

the Bravo paused and looked doubtfully, again, at his companion.

“ Say on, Jacopo.”

“ I have not dared to trust my secrets even to the confessional, Signore, and can I be so bold as to offer them to you ?”

“ Truly, it is a strange behest !”

“ Signore, it is. You are noble, I am of humble blood. Your ancestors were senators and doges of Venice, while mine have been, since the fishermen first built their huts in the Lagunes, labourers on the canals, and rowers of gondolas. You are powerful, and rich, and courted ; while I am denounced and, in secret, I fear, condemned. In short, you are Don Camillo Monforte, and I am Jacopo Frontoni !”

Don Camillo was touched, for the Bravo spoke without bitterness, and in deep sorrow.

“ I would thou wert at the confessional, poor Jacopo !” he said ; “ I am little able to give ease to such a burthen.”

“ Signore, I have lived too long, shut out

from the good wishes of my fellows, and I can bear with it no longer. The accursed senate may cut me off without warning, and then who will stop to look at my grave. Signore, I must speak, or die !”

“Thy case is piteous, Jacopo !—Thou hast need of ghostly counsel.”

“Here is no priest, Signore, and I carry a weight past bearing. The only man who has shewn interest in me, for three long and dreadful years, is gone !”

“But he will return, poor Jacopo.”

“Signore, he will never return. He is with the fishes of the Lagunes.”

“By thy hand, monster !”

“By the justice of the illustrious republic,” said the Bravo, with a smothered but bitter smile.

“Ha ! they are then awake to the acts of thy class ? Thy repentance is the fruit of fear !”

Jacopo seemed choked. He had evidently

counted on the awakened sympathy of his companion, notwithstanding the difference in their situations, and to be thus thrown off again, unmanned him. He shuddered, and every muscle and nerve appeared about to yield its power. Touched by so unequivocal signs of suffering, Don Camillo kept close at his side, reluctant to enter more deeply into the feelings of one of his known character, and yet unable to desert a fellow creature in so grievous agony.

"Signor Duca," said the Bravo, with a pathos in his voice that went to the heart of his auditor, "leave me. If they ask for a proscribed man, let them come here; in the morning they will find my body near the graves of the heretics."

"Speak, I will hear thee."

Jacopo looked up with doubt expressed on his features.

"Unburthen thyself; I will listen, though thou recounted the assassination of my dearest friend."

The oppressed Bravo gazed at him, as if he still distrusted his sincerity. His face worked, and his look became still more wistful; but as Don Camillo faced the moon, and betrayed the extent of his sympathy, the other burst into tears.

"Jacopo, I will hear thee—I will hear thee, poor Jacopo!" cried Don Camillo, shocked at this exhibition of distress in one so stern by nature. A wave from the hand of the Bravo silenced him, and Jacopo, struggling with himself for a moment, spoke.

"You have saved a soul from perdition, Signore;" he said, smothering his emotion. "If the happy knew how much power belongs to a single word of kindness—a glance of feeling, when given to the despised, they would not look so coldly on the miserable. This night must have been my last, had you cast me off without pity—but you will hear my tale, Signore—you will not scorn the confession of a Bravo?"

"I have promised. Be brief, for at this moment I have great care of my own."

"Signore, I know not the whole of your wrongs, but they will not be less likely to be redressed for this grace."

Jacopo made an effort to command himself, when he commenced his tale.

The course of the narrative does not require that we should accompany this extraordinary man, through the relation of the secrets he imparted to Don Camillo. It is enough, for our present purposes, to say, that, as he proceeded, the young Calabrian noble drew nearer to his side, and listened with growing interest. The Duke of Sant' Agata scarcely breathed, while his companion, with that energy of language and feeling which marks Italian character, recounted his secret sorrows, and the scenes in which he had been an actor. Long before he was done, Don Camillo had forgotten his own private causes of concern, and, by the time the tale was finished, every shade of disgust had

given place to an ungovernable expression of pity. In short, so eloquent was the speaker, and so interesting the facts with which he dealt, that he seemed to play with the sympathies of his listener, as the improvisatore of that region is known to lead captive the passions of the admiring crowd.

During the time Jacopo was speaking, he and his wondering auditor had passed the limits of the despised cemetery; and as the voice of the former ceased, they stood on the outer beach of the Lido. When the low tones of the Bravo were no longer audible, they were succeeded by the sullen wash of the Adriatic.

"This surpasseth belief!" Don Camillo exclaimed, after a long pause, which had only been disturbed by the rush and retreat of the waters.

"Signore, as holy Maria is kind! it is true."

"I doubt you not, Jacopo—poor Jacopo! I cannot distrust a tale thus told! Thou hast, indeed, been a victim of their hellish duplicity

and well mayest thou say, the load was past bearing. What is thy intention?"

"I serve them no longer, Don Camillo—I wait only for the last solemn scene, which is now certain, and then I quit this city of deceit, to seek my fortune in another region. They have blasted my youth, and loaded my name with infamy.—God may yet lighten the load!"

"Reproach not thyself beyond reason, Jacopo, for the happiest and most fortunate of us all are not above the power of temptation. Thou knowest that even my name and rank have not, altogether, protected me from their arts."

"I know them capable, Signore, of deluding angels! Their arts are only surpassed by their means, and their pretence of virtue by their indifference to its practice."

"Thou sayest true, Jacopo: the truth is never in greater danger, than when whole communities lend themselves to the vicious deception of seemliness, and without truth there is no

virtue. This it is to substitute profession for practice—to use the altar for a worldly purpose—and to bestow power without any other responsibility than that which is exacted by the selfishness of caste! Jacopo—poor Jacopo! thou shalt be my servitor—I am lord of my own seignories, and once rid of this specious republic, I charge myself with the care of thy safety and fortunes. Be at peace as respects thy conscience: I have interest near the holy see, and thou shalt not want absolution!”

The gratitude of the Bravo was more vivid in feeling than in expression. He kissed the hand of Don Camillo, but it was with a reservation of self-respect, that belonged to the character of the man.

“A system like this of Venice,” continued the musing noble, “leaves none of us masters of our own acts. The wiles of such a combination are stronger than the will. It cloaks its offences against right in a thousand specious forms, and it enlists the support of every man, under the

pretence of a sacrifice for the common good. We often fancy ourselves simple dealers in some justifiable state intrigue, when in truth we are deep in sin. Falsehood is the parent of all crimes, and in no case has it a progeny so numerous, as that in which its own birth is derived from the state. I fear I may have made sacrifices, to this treacherous influence, I could wish forgotten."

Though Don Camillo soliloquized, rather than addressed his companion, it was evident, by the train of his thoughts, that the narrative of Jacopo had awakened disagreeable reflections, on the manner in which he had pushed his own claims, with the senate. Perhaps he felt the necessity of some apology to one who, though so much his inferior in rank, was so competent to appreciate his conduct, and who had just denounced in the strongest language, his own fatal subserviency to the arts of that irresponsible and meretricious body.

Jacopo uttered a few words of a general na-

ture, but such as had a tendency to quiet the uneasiness of his companion; after which, with a readiness that proved him qualified for the many delicate missions with which he had been charged, he ingeniously turned the discourse to the recent abduction of Donna Violetta, with the offer of rendering his new employer all the services in his power to regain his bride.

"That thou mayest know all thou hast undertaken," rejoined Don Camillo, "listen, Jacopo, and I will conceal nothing from thy shrewdness."

The Duke of Sant' Agata now briefly, but explicitly, laid bare to his companion all his own views and measures, with respect to her he loved, and all those events, with which the reader has already become acquainted.

The Bravo gave great attention to the minutest parts of the detail, and more than once, as the other proceeded, he smiled to himself, like a man who was able to trace the secret

means, by which this or that intrigue had been effected. The whole was just related, when the sound of a footstep announced the return of Gino.

CHAPTER, VIII.

“Pale she look’d,
Yet cheerful; though methought, once, if not twice,
She wiped away a tear that would be coming.”

ROGERS.

THE hours passed as if nought had occurred, within the barriers of the city, to disturb their progress. On the following morning men proceeded to their several pursuits, of business or of pleasure, as had been done for ages, and none stopped to question his neighbour of the scenes which might have taken place during the night. Some were gay, and others sorrowing; some idle, and others occupied; here one toiled,

there another sported ; and Venice presented, as of wont, its noiseless, suspicious, busy, mysterious, and yet stirring throngs, as it had before done at a thousand similar risings of the sun.

The menials lingered around the water-gate of Donna Violetta's palace, with distrustful but cautious faces, scarce whispering among themselves their secret suspicions of the fate of their mistress. The residence of the Signor Gradnigo presented its usual gloomy magnificence, while the abode of Don Camillo Monforte betrayed no sign of the heavy disappointment which its master had sustained. The Bella Sorrentina still lay in the port, with a yard on deck, while the crew repaired its sail in the lazy manner of mariners, who work without excitement.

The Lagunes were dotted with the boats of fishermen, and travellers arrived and departed from the city, by the well-known channels of Fusina and Mestre. Here, some adventurer



from the north quitted the canals, on his return towards the Alps, carrying with him a pleasing picture of the ceremonies he had witnessed, mingled with some crude conjectures of that power which predominated in the suspected state; and there, a countryman of the Main sought his little farm, satisfied with the pageants and regatta of the previous day. In short, all seemed as usual, and the events we have related remained a secret with the actors, and that mysterious council which had so large a share in their existence.

As the day advanced, many a sail was spread for the pillars of Hercules, or the genial Levant, and felucas, mystics and golettas, went and came, as the land or sea-breeze prevailed. Still the mariner of Calabria lounged beneath the awning which sheltered his deck, or took his siesta on a pile of old sails, which were ragged with the force of many a hot scirocco. As the sun fell, the gondolas of the great and idle began to glide over the water; and when the two squares

were cooled by the air of the Adriatic, the Broglio began to fill with those privileged to pace its vaulted passage. Among these came the Duke of Sant' Agata, who, though an alien to the laws of the republic, being of so illustrious descent, and of claims so equitable, was received among the senators, in their moments of ease, as a welcome sharer in this vain distinction. He entered the Broglio at the wonted hour, and with his usual composure, for he trusted to his secret influence at Rome, and something to the success of his rivals, for impunity. Reflection had shewn Don Camillo that, as his plans were known to the council, they would long since have arrested him, had such been their intention; and it had also led him to believe, that the most efficient manner of avoiding the personal consequences of his adventure, was to shew confidence in his own power to withstand them. When he appeared, therefore, leaning on the arm of a high officer of the papal embassy, and with an eye that spoke assurance



in himself, he was greeted, as usual, by all who knew him, as was due to his rank and expectations. Still Don Camillo walked among the patricians of the republic with novel sensations. More than once he thought he detected, in the wandering glances of those with whom he conversed, signs of their knowledge of his frustrated attempt, and more than once, when he at least suspected such scrutiny, his countenance was watched, as if the observer sought some evidence of his future intentions. Beyond this, none might have discovered that an heiress of so much importance had been so near being lost to the state, or, on the other hand, that a bridegroom had been robbed of his bride. Habitual art, on the part of the state, and resolute but wary intention, on the part of the young noble, concealed all else from observation.

In this manner the day passed, not a tongue in Venice, beyond those which whispered in secret, making any allusion to the incidents of our tale.

Just as the sun was setting, a gondola swept slowly up to the water-gate of the ducal palace. The gondolier landed, fastened his boat in the usual manner to the stepping stones, and entered the court. He wore a mask, for the hour of disguise had come, and his attire was so like the ordinary fashion of men of his class, as to defeat recognition by its simplicity. Glancing an eye about him, he entered the building by a private door.

The edifice in which the Doges of Venice dwelt still stands a gloomy monument of the policy of the republic, furnishing evidence, in itself, of the specious character of the prince whom it held. It is built around a vast but gloomy court, as is usual with nearly all of the principal edifices of Europe. One of its fronts forms a side of the piazzetta, so often mentioned, and another lines the quay next the port. The architecture of these two exterior faces of the palace renders the structure remarkable. A low portico, which forms the Broglio, sustains a row

of massive oriental windows, and above these again lies a pile of masonry, slightly relieved by apertures, which reverses the ordinary uses of the art. A third front is nearly concealed by the cathedral of St. Mark, and the fourth is washed by its canal. The public prison of the city forms the other side of this canal, eloquently proclaiming the nature of the government by the close approximation of the powers of legislation and of punishment. The famous Bridge of Sighs is the material, and we might add the metaphorical, link between the two. The latter edifice stands on the quay, also, and though less lofty and spacious, in point of architectural beauty it is the superior structure, though the quaintness and unusual style of the palace is most apt to attract attention.

The masked gondolier soon re-appeared beneath the arch of the water-gate, and with a hurried step he sought his boat. It required but a minute to cross the canal, to land on the opposite quay, and to enter the public door of

the prison. It would seem that he had some secret means of satisfying the vigilance of the different keepers, for bolts were drawn, and doors unlocked, with little question, wherever he presented himself. In this manner he quickly passed all the outer barriers of the place, and reached a part of the building, which had the appearance of being fitted for the accommodation of a family. Judging from the air of all around him, those who dwelt there took the luxury of their abode but little into the account, though neither the furniture nor the rooms were wanting in most of the necessities, suited to people of their class and the climate, and in that age.

The gondolier had ascended a private stairway, and he was now before a door, which had none of those signs of a prison, that so freely abounded in other parts of the building. He paused to listen, and then tapped, with singular caution.

“ Who is without?” asked a gentle female

voice, at the same instant that the latch moved and fell again, as if she within waited to be assured of the character of her visitor, before she opened the door.

"A friend to thee, Gelsomina;" was the answer.

"Nay, here all are friends to the keepers, if words can be believed. You must name yourself, or go elsewhere for your answer."

The gondolier removed the mask a little, which had altered his voice as well as concealed his face.

"It is I, Gessina," he said, using the diminutive of her name.

The bolts grated and the door was hurriedly opened.

"It is wonderful that I did not know thee, Carlo!" said the female, with eager simplicity; "but thou takest so many disguises of late, and so counterfeitest strange voices, that thine own mother might have distrusted her ear."

The gondolier paused to make certain they

were alone; then, laying aside the mask altogether, he exposed the features of the Bravo.

“Thou knowest the need of caution,” he added, “and wilt not judge me harshly.”

“I said not that, Carlo—but thy voice is so familiar, that I thought it wonderful thou couldst speak as a stranger.”

“Hast thou aught for me?”

The gentle girl, for she was both young and gentle, hesitated.

“Hast thou aught new, Gelsomina?” repeated the Bravo, reading her innocent face with his searching glance.

“Thou art fortunate in not being sooner in the prison. I have just had a visitor. Thou wouldst not have liked to be seen, Carlo?”

“Thou knowest I have good reasons for coming masked. I might, or I might not have disliked thy acquaintance, as he should have proved.”

“Nay, now thou judgest wrong;” returned

the female, hastily, "I had no other, here, but my cousin, Annina."

"Dost thou think me jealous?" said the Bravo, smiling in kindness, as he took her hand. "Had it been thy cousin Pietro, or Michele, or Roberto, or any other youth of Venice, I should have no other dread than that of being known."

"But it was only Annina—my cousin, Annina, whom thou hast never seen—and I have no cousins Pietro, and Michele, and Roberto. We are not many, Carlo. Annina has a brother, but he never comes hither. Indeed it is long since she has found it convenient to quit her trade to come to this dreary place. Few children of sisters see each other so seldom as Annina and I!"

"Thou art a good girl, Gessina, and art always to be found near thy mother. Hast thou nought in particular, for my ear?"

Again the soft eyes of Gelsomina, or Gessina, as she was familiarly called, dropped to the

floor—but raising them, ere he could note the circumstance, she hurriedly continued the discourse.

“ I fear Annina will return, or I would go with thee, at once.”

“ Is this cousin of thine still here, then?” asked the Bravo, with uneasiness. — “ Thou knowest I would not be seen.”

“ Fear not. She cannot enter without touching that bell, for she is above with my poor bed-ridden mother. Thou canst go into the inner room, as usual, when she comes, and listen to her idle discourse, if thou wilt—or—but we have not time—for Annina comes seldom, and I know not why, but she seems to love a sick room little, as she never stays many minutes with her aunt.”

“ Thou wouldst have said, or I might go on my errand, Gessina?”

“ I would, Carlo—but I am certain we should be recalled by my impatient cousin.”

“I can wait ; I am patient when with thee, dearest Gessina.”

“Hist !—’Tis my cousin’s step.—Thou canst go in.”

While she spoke, a small bell rang, and the Bravo withdrew into the inner room, like one accustomed to that place of retreat. He left the door ajar, for the darkness of the closet sufficiently concealed his person. In the mean time, Gelsomina opened the outer door for the admission of her visitor. At the first sound of the latter’s voice, Jacopo, who had little suspected the fact from a name which was so common, recognised the artful daughter of the wine-seller.

“Thou art at thy ease, here, Gelsomina ;” cried the latter, entering and throwing herself into a seat, like one fatigued. “Thy mother is better, and thou art truly mistress of the house.”

“I would I were not, Annina, for I am young to have this trust, with this affliction.”

“ It is not so insupportable, Gessina, to be mistress within doors, at seventeen ! Authority is sweet, and obedience is odious.”

“ I have found neither so, and I will give up the first with joy, whenever my poor mother shall be able to take command of her own family, again.”

“ This is well, Gessina, and does credit to the good father confessor. But authority is dear to woman, and so is liberty. Thou wast not with the maskers yesterday, in the square ?”

“ I seldom wear a disguise, and I could not quit my mother.”

“ Which means that thou wouldst have been glad to do it. Thou hast good reason for thy regrets, since a gayer marriage of the sea, or a braver regatta, has not been witnessed in Venice, since thou wast born. But the first was to be seen from thy window ?”

“ I saw the galley of state sweeping toward the Lido, and the train of patricians on its deck ; but little else.”

“No matter. Thou shalt have as good an idea of the pageant as if thou hadst played the part of the doge himself. First came the men of the guard, with their ancient dresses—”

“Nay, this I remember to have often seen; for the same shew is kept, from year to year.”

“Thou art right; but Venice never witnessed such a brave regatta! Thou knowest the first trial is always between gondolas of many oars, steered by the best esteemed of the canals. Luigi was there, and though he did not win, he more than merited success, by the manner in which he directed his boat. Thou knowest Luigi?”

“I scarce know any in Venice, Annina, for the long illness of my mother, and this unhappy office of my father, keep me within, when others are on the canals.”

“True. Thou art not well placed to make acquaintances. But Luigi is second to no gondolier, in skill or reputation, and he is much the merriest rogue of them all, that put foot on the Lido.”

“ He was foremost, then, in the grand race?”

“ He should have been, but the awkwardness of his fellows, and some unfairness in the crossing, threw him back to be second. ’Twas a sight to behold, that of many noble watermen struggling to maintain or to get a name on the canals. Santa Maria! I would thou couldst have seen it, girl!”

“ I should not have been glad to see a friend defeated.”

“ We must take fortune as it offers. But the most wonderful sight of the day, after all, though Luigi and his fellows did so well, was to see a poor fisherman, named Antonio, in his bare head and naked legs, a man of seventy years, and with a boat no better than that I use to carry liquors to the Lido, entering into the second race, and carrying off the prize!”

“ He could not have met with powerful rivals?”

“ The best of Venice ; though Luigi, having

strived for the first, could not enter for the second trial. 'Tis said, too," continued Annina, looking about her with habitual caution, " that one, who may scarce be named in Venice, had the boldness to appear in that regatta masked ; and yet the fisherman won ! Thou hast heard of Jacopo ?"

" The name is common."

" There is but one who bears it now, in Venice.—All mean the same when they say Jacopo."

" I have heard of a monster of that name. Surely he hath not dared to shew himself among the nobles, on such a festa !"

" Gessina, we live in an unaccountable country ! The man walks the piazza with a step as lordly as the doge, at his pleasure, and yet none say aught to him ! I have seen him, at noon-day, leaning against the triumphal mast, or the column of San Teodoro, with as proud an air as if he were put there to celebrate a victory of the republic !"

“ Perhaps he is master of some terrible secret, which they fear he will reveal ? ”

“ Thou knowest little of Venice, child ! Holy Maria ! a secret of that kind is a death-warrant of itself. It is as dangerous to know too much, as it is to know too little, when one deals with St. Mark. But they say Jacopo was there, standing eye to eye with the doge, and scaring the senators as if he had been an uncalled spectre from the vaults of their fathers. Nor is this all ; as I crossed the Lagunes this morning, I saw the body of a young cavalier drawn from the water, and those who were near it, said it had the mark of his fatal hand ! ”

The timid Gelsomina shuddered.

“ They who rule,” she said, “ will have to answer for this negligence to God, if they let the wretch longer go at large.”

“ Blessed St. Mark protect his children ! They say there is much of this sort of sin to answer for—but see the body I did, with my own eyes, in entering the canals this morning.”

“ And didst thou sleep on the Lido, that thou wert abroad so early ?”

“ The Lido—yes—nay—I slept not, but thou knowest my father had a busy day during the revels, and I am not like thee, Gessina, mistress of the household, to do as I would. But I tarry here to chat with thee, when there is great need of industry at home. Hast thou the package, child, which I trusted to thy keeping, at my last visit ?”

“ It is here,” answered Gelsomina, opening a drawer, and handing to her cousin a small but closely enveloped package, which, unknown to herself, contained some articles of forbidden commerce, and which the other, in her indefatigable activity, had been obliged to secrete for a time. “ I had begun to think that thou hadst forgotten it, and was about to send it to thee.”

“ Gelsomina, if thou lovest me, never do so rash an act! My brother Guiseppe—thou scarce knowest Guiseppe ?”

“ We have little acquaintance, for cousins.”

“ Thou art fortunate in thy ignorance. I cannot say what I might of the child of the same parents, but had Guiseppe seen this package, by any accident, it might have brought thee into great trouble!”

“ Nay, I fear not thy brother, nor any else,” said the daughter of the prison-keeper, with the firmness of innocence; “ he could do me no harm for dealing kindly by a relative.”

“ Thou art right; but he might have caused me great vexation. Sainted Maria! if thou knewest the pain that unthinking and misguided boy gives his family! He is my brother, after all, and you will fancy the rest. Addio, good Gessina; I hope thy father will permit thee to come and visit, at last, those who so much love thee.”

“ Addio, Annina; thou knowest I would come gladly, but that I scarce quit the side of my poor mother.”

The wily daughter of the wine-seller gave her

guileless and unsuspecting friend a kiss, and then she was let out and departed.

“Carlo,” said the soft voice of Gessina; “thou canst come forth, for we have no further fear of visits.”

The Bravo appeared, but with a paleness deeper than common on his cheek. He looked mournfully at the gentle and affectionate being who awaited his return, and when he struggled to answer her ingenuous smile, the abortive effort gave his features an expression of ghastliness.

“Annina has wearied thee with her idle discourse of the regatta, and of murders on the canals. Thou wilt not judge her harshly, for the manner in which she spoke of Giuseppe, who may deserve this, and more. But, I know thy impatience, and I will not increase thy weariness.”

“Hold, Gessina—this girl is thy cousin?”

“Have I not told thee so; our mothers are sisters.”

“And she is here often?”

“Not as often as she could wish, I am certain, for her aunt has not quitted her room for many, many months.”

“Thou art an excellent daughter, kind Gesina, and would make all others as virtuous as thyself.—And thou hast been to return these visits?”

“Never. My father forbids it, for they are dealers in wines, and entertain the gondoliers in revelry. But Annina is blameless for the trade of her parents.”

“No doubt—and that package? it hath been long in thy keeping.”

“A month; Annina left it at her last visit, for she was hurried to cross to the Lido. But why these questions? You do not like my cousin, who is giddy, and given to idle conversation, but who, I think, must have a good heart. Thou heard'st the manner in which she spoke of the wretched bravo, Jacopo, and of this late murder?”



“ I did.”

“ Thou couldst not have shewn more horror at the monster’s crime thyself, Carlo. Nay, Annina is thoughtless, and she might be less worldly ; but she hath, like all of us, a holy aversion to sin. Shall I lead thee to the cell ?”

“ Go on.”

“ Thy honest nature revolts, Carlo, at the cold villany of the assassin. I have heard much of his murders, and of the manner in which those up above bear with him. They say, in common, that his art surpasseth theirs, and that the officers wait for proof, that they may not do injustice.”

“ Is the senate so tender, think you ?” asked the Bravo, huskily, but motioning for his companion to proceed.

The girl looked sad, like one who felt the force of this question ; and she turned away to open a private door, whence she brought forth a little box.

“ This is the key, Carlo,” she said, shewing

him one of a massive bunch, "and I am now the sole warder. This much, at least, we have effected ; the day may still come when we shall do more."

The Bravo endeavoured to smile, as if he appreciated her kindness ; but he only succeeded in making her understand his desire to go on. The eye of the gentle-hearted girl lost its gleam of hope in an expression of sorrow, and she obeyed.

CHAPTER IX.

But let us to the roof,
And, when thou hast surveyed the sea, the land,
Visit the narrow cells that cluster there,
As in a place of tombs.

St. Mark's Place.

WE shall not attempt to thread the vaulted galleries, the gloomy corridors, and all the apartments, through which the keeper's daughter led her companion. Those, who have ever entered an extensive prison, will require no description to revive the feeling of pain which it excited, by barred windows, creaking hinges, grating bolts, and all those other signs, which are alike the means and evidence of incarceration.

tion. The building, unhappily like most other edifices intended to repress the vices of society, was vast, strong, and intricate within, although, as has been already intimated, of a chaste and simple beauty externally, that might seem to have been adopted in mockery of its destination.

Gelsomina entered a low, narrow, and glazed gallery, when she stopped.

“Thou soughtest me, as wont, beneath the water-gate, Carlo,” she asked, “at the usual hour?”

“I should not have entered the prison had I found thee there, for thou knowest I would be little seen. But I bethought me of thy mother, and crossed the canal.”

“Thou wast wrong. My mother rests much as she has done, for many months—thou must have seen that we are not taking the usual route to the cell?”

“I have; but as we are not accustomed to meet in thy father’s rooms, on this errand, I thought this the necessary direction.”

“Hast thou much knowledge of the palace and the prison, Carlo?”

“More than I could wish, good Gelsomina; —but why am I thus questioned, at a moment when I would be otherwise employed?”

The timid and conscious girl did not answer. Her cheek was never bright, for like a flower reared in the shade, it had the delicate hue of her secluded life; but at this question it became pale. Accustomed to the ingenuous habits of the sensitive being at his side, the Bravo studied her speaking features intently. He moved swiftly to a window, and looking out, his eye fell upon a narrow and gloomy canal. Crossing the gallery, he cast a glance beneath him, and saw the same dark watery passage, leading between the masonry of two massive piles to the quay and the port.

“Gelsomina!” he cried, recoiling from the sight, “this is the Bridge of Sighs!”

“It is, Carlo; hast thou ever crossed it before?”

"Never: nor do I understand why I cross it now. I have long thought that it might one day be my fortune to walk this fatal passage, but I could not dream of such a keeper!"

The eye of Gelsomina brightened, and her smile was cheerful.

"Thou wilt never cross it, to thy harm, with me."

"Of that I am certain, kind Gessina," he answered, taking her hand. "But this is a riddle that I cannot explain. Art thou in the habit of entering the palace by this gallery?"

"It is little used, except by the keepers and the condemned, as doubtless thou hast often heard; but yet they have given me the keys, and taught me the windings of the place, in order that I might serve, as usual, for thy guide."

"Gelsomina, I fear I have been too happy in thy company to note, as prudence would have told me, the rare kindness of the council in permitting me to enjoy it!"

“Dost thou repent, Carlo, that thou hast known me?”

The reproachful melancholy of her voice touched the Bravo, who kissed the hand he held, with Italian fervour.

“I should then repent me of the only hours of happiness I have known for years,” he said. “Thou hast been to me, Gelsomina, like a flower in a desert—a pure spring to a feverish man—a gleam of hope to one suffering under malediction.—No, no; not for a moment have I repented knowing thee, my Gelsomina!”

“’Twould not have made my life more happy, Carlo, to have thought I had added to thy sorrows. I am young, and ignorant of the world, but I know we should cause joy, and not pain, to those we esteem.”

“Thy nature would teach thee this gentle lesson. But, is it not strange that one, like me, should be suffered to visit the prison unattended by any other keeper?”

"I had not thought it so, Carlo; but, surely it is not common!"

"We have found so much pleasure in each other, dear Gessina, that we have overlooked what ought to have caused alarm."

"Alarm, Carlo!"

"Or, at least, distrust; for these wily senators do no act of mercy without a motive. But it is now too late to recal the past, if we would, and in that which relates to thee I would not lose the memory of a moment. Let us proceed."

The slight cloud vanished from the face of the mild auditor of the Bravo; but still she did not move.

"Few pass this bridge, they say," she added, tremulously, "and enter the world again; and yet thou dost not even ask why we are here, Carlo!"

There was a transient gleam of distrust in the hasty glance of the Bravo, as he shot a look at the undisturbed eye of the innocent being who put this question. But it scarcely re-

mained long enough to change the expression of manly interest she was accustomed to meet in his look.

"Since thou wilt have me curious," he said, "why hast thou come hither, and more than all, being here, why dost thou linger?"

"The season is advanced, Carlo," she answered, speaking scarcely above her breath, "and we should look in vain among the cells."

"I understand thee," he said; "we will proceed"

Gelsomina lingered to gaze wistfully into the face of her companion, but finding no visible sign of the agony he endured, she went on. Jacopo spoke hoarsely, but he was too long accustomed to disguise, to permit the weakness to escape, when he knew how much it would pain the sensitive and faithful being, who had yielded her affections to him, with a singleness and devotion which arose nearly as much from her manner of life, as from natural ingenuousness.

In order that the reader may be enabled to understand the allusions, which seem to be so plain to our lovers, it may be necessary to explain another odious feature in the policy of the republic of Venice.

Whatever may be the pretension of a state, in its acknowledged theories, an unerring clue to its true character is ever to be found in the machinery of its practice. In those governments which are created for the good of the people, force is applied with caution and reluctance, since the protection and not the injury of the weak is their object ; whereas the more selfish and exclusive the system becomes, the more severe and ruthless are the coercive means employed by those in power. Thus, in Venice, whose whole political fabric reposed on the narrow foundation of an oligarchy, the jealousy of the senate brought the engines of despotism in absolute contact with even the pageantry of their titular prince, and the palace of the doge himself was polluted by the presence of

the dungeons. The princely edifice had its summer and winter cells. The reader may be ready to believe that mercy had dictated some slight solace for the miserable, in this arrangement. But this would be ascribing pity to a body, which, to its latest moment, had no tie to subject it to the weakness of humanity. So far from consulting the sufferings of the captive, his winter cell was below the level of the canals, while his summers were to be past beneath the leads, exposed to the action of the burning sun of that climate. As the reader has probably anticipated, already, that Jacopo was in the prison on an errand connected with some captive, this short explanation will enable him to understand the secret allusion of his companion. He they sought had, in truth, been recently conveyed from the damp cells, where he had passed the winter and spring, to the heated chambers beneath the roof.

Gelsomina continued to lead the way, with a sadness of eye and feature, that betrayed her

strong sympathy with the sufferings of her companion, but without appearing to think further delay necessary. She had communicated a circumstance, which weighed heavily on her own mind, and, like most of her mild temperament, who had dreaded such a duty, now that it was discharged, she experienced a sensible relief. They ascended many flights of steps, opened and shut numberless doors, and threaded several narrow corridors, in silence, before reaching the place of destination. While Gelsomina sought the key of the door, before which they stopped, in the large bunch she carried, the Bravo breathed the hot air of the attic, like one who was suffocating.

“ They promised me that this should not be done again !” he said.—“ But they forget their pledges, fiends, as they are !”

“ Carlo !—thou forgettest that this is the palace of the doge !” whispered the girl, while she threw a timid glance behind her.

“ I forget nothing that is connected with the republic !—It is all here,” striking his flushed brow—“ what is not there, is in my heart !”

“ Poor Carlo ! this cannot last for ever—there will be an end.”

“ Thou art right ;” answered the Bravo, hoarsely.—“ The end is nearer than thou think-est.—No matter ; turn the key, that we may go in.”

The hand of Gelsomina lingered on the lock, but, admonished by his impatient eye, she complied, and they entered the cell.

“ Father !” exclaimed the Bravo, hastening to the side of a pallet, that lay on the floor.

The attenuated and feeble form of an old man rose at the word, and an eye which, while it spoke mental feebleness, was at that moment even brighter than that of his son, glared on the faces of Gelsomina and her companion.

“ Thou hast not suffered, as I had feared, by this sudden change, father !” continued the latter, kneeling by the side of the straw. —“ Thine eye,

and cheek, and countenance are better, than in the damp caves below !”

“ I am happy, here,” returned the prisoner ; —“ there is light, and though they have given me too much of it, thou canst never know, my boy, the joy of looking at the day, after so long a night.”

“ He is better, Gelsomina !—They have not yet destroyed him. See !—his eye is bright even, and his cheek has a glow !”

“ They are ever so, after passing the winter in the lower dungeons ;” whispered the gentle girl.

“ Hast thou news for me, boy ?—What tidings from thy mother ?”

Jacopo bowed his head to conceal the anguish occasioned by this question, which he now heard for the hundredth time.

“ She is happy, father—happy as one can be, who so well loves thee, when away from thy side.”

“ Does she speak of me often ?”

“ The last word, that I heard from her lips, was thy name.”

“ Holy Maria bless her ! I trust she remembers me in her prayers ?”

“ Doubt it not, father,—they are the prayers of an angel !”

“ And thy patient sister ?—thou hast not named her, son.”

“ She, too, is well, father.”

“ Has she ceased to blame herself for being the innocent cause of my suffering ?”

“ She has.”

“ Then she pines no longer, over a blow that cannot be helped.”

The Bravo seemed to search for relief in the sympathizing eye of the pale and speechless Gelsomina.

“ She has ceased to pine, father ;” he uttered, with compelled calmness.

“ Thou hast ever loved thy sister, boy, with manly tenderness. Thy heart is kind, as I have reason to know. If God has given me grief, he *has* blessed me, in my children !”

A long pause followed, during which the parent seemed to muse on the past, while the child rejoiced in the suspension of questions which harrowed his soul, since those of whom the other spoke had long been the victims of family misfortune. The old man, for the prisoner was aged, as well as feeble, turned his look on the still kneeling Bravo, thoughtfully, and continued.

“ There is little hope of thy sister marrying, for none are fond of tying themselves to the proscribed.”

“ She wishes it not—she wishes it not—she is happy, with my mother !”

“ It is a happiness the republic will not begrudge. Is there no hope of our being able to meet soon ?”

“ Thou wilt meet my mother,—yes, that pleasure will come at last !”

“ It is a weary time since any of my blood, but thee, has stood in my sight. Kneel, that I may bless thee.”

Jacopo, who had arisen under his mental torture, obeyed, and bowed his head in reverence to receive the paternal benediction. The lips of the old man moved, and his eyes were turned to Heaven, but his language was of the heart, rather than that of the tongue. Gelsomina bent her head to her bosom, and seemed to unite her prayers to those of the prisoner. When the silent but solemn ceremony was ended, each made the customary sign of the cross, and Jacopo kissed the wrinkled hand of the captive.

“Hast thou hope for me?” the old man asked, this pious and grateful duty done. “Do they still promise to let me look upon the sun, again?”

“They do.—They promise fair.”

“Would that their words were true! I have lived on hope, for a weary time—I have now been within these walls, more than four years, methinks.”

Jacopo did not answer, for he knew that his

father named the period only that he himself had been permitted to see him.

“ I built upon the expectation, that the doge would remember his ancient servant, and open my prison-doors.”

Still Jacopo was silent, for the doge, of whom the other spoke, had long been dead.

“ And yet I should be grateful, for Maria and the saints have not forgotten me. I am not without my pleasures, in captivity.”

“ God be praised !” exclaimed the Bravo.
“ In what manner dost thou ease thy sorrows, father ?”

“ Look hither, boy,” returned the old man, whose eye betrayed a mixture of feverish excitement, caused by the recent change in his prison, and the growing imbecility of a mind that was gradually losing its powers for want of use ; “ dost thou see the rent in that bit of wood ? It opens with the heat, from time to time, and since I have been an inhabitant here, that fissure has doubled in length—I sometimes

fancy, that when it reaches the knot, the hearts of the senators will soften, and that my doors will open. There is a satisfaction, in watching its increase, as it lengthens, inch by inch, year after year!"

"Is this all?"

"Nay, I have other pleasures. There was a spider the past year, that wove his web from yonder beam, and he was a companion, too, that I loved to see; wilt thou look, boy, if there is hope of his coming back?"

"I see him not;" whispered the Bravo.

"Well, there is always the hope of its return. The flies will enter soon, and then he will be looking for his prey. They may shut me up on a false charge, and keep me weary years from my wife and daughter, but they cannot rob me of all my happiness!"

The aged captive was mute and thoughtful. A childish impatience glowed in his eye, and he gazed from the rent, the companion of so many solitary summers, to the face of his son,

like one who began to distrust his enjoyments.

“ Well, let them take it away,” he said, burying his head beneath the covering of his bed ; “ I will not curse them !”

“ Father !”

The prisoner made no reply.

“ Father !”

“ Jacopo !”

In his turn the Bravo was speechless. He did not venture, even, to steal a glance towards the breathless and attentive Gelsomina, though his bosom heaved with longing to examine her guileless features.

“ Dost thou hear me, son ?” continued the prisoner, uncovering his head ; “ dost thou really think they will have the heart to chace the spider from my cell ?”

“ They will leave thee this pleasure, father, for it touches neither their power, nor their fame. So long as the senate can keep its foot on the neck of the people, and so long as it can

keep the seemliness of a good name, it will not envy thee this."

"Blessed Maria, make me thankful!—I had my fears, child; for it is not pleasant to lose any friend in a cell!"

Jacopo then proceeded to soothe the mind of the prisoner, and he gradually led his thoughts to other subjects. He laid by the bed-side a few articles of food, that he was allowed to bring with him, and again holding out the hope of eventual liberation, he proposed to take his leave.

"I will try to believe thee, son," said the old man, who had good reason to distrust assurances so often made. "I will do all I can to believe it. Thou wilt tell thy mother, that I never cease to think of her, and to pray for her; and thou wilt bless thy sister, in the name of her poor imprisoned parent."

The Bravo bowed in acquiescence, glad of any means to escape speech. At a sign from the old man he again bent his knee, and re-

ceived the parting benediction. After busying himself in arranging the scanty furniture of the cell, and in trying to open one or two small fissures, with a view to admit more light and air, he quitted the place.

Neither Gelsomina nor Jacopo spoke, as they returned by the intricate passages through which they had ascended to the attic, until they were again on the Bridge of Sighs. It was seldom that human foot trod this gallery, and the former, with female quickness, selected it as a place suited to their further conference.

“Dost thou find him changed?” she asked, lingering on the arch.

“Much.”

“Thou speakest with a frightful meaning!”

“I have not taught my countenance to lie to thee, Gelsomina.”

“But there is hope.—Thou told'st him there was hope, thyself.”

“Blessed Maria forgive the fraud! I could not rob the little life he has, of its only comfort.”

“ Carlo !—Carlo !—Why art thou so calm ? I have never heard thee speak so calmly of thy father’s wrongs and imprisonment.”

“ It is because his liberation is near.”

“ But this moment he was without hope, and thou speakest, now, of liberation !”

“ The liberation of death. Even the anger of the senate will respect the grave.”

“ Dost thou think his end near ? I had not seen this change.”

“ Thou art kind, good Gelsomina, and true to thy friends, and without suspicion of those crimes of which thou art so innocent ; but to one, who has seen as much evil as I, a jealous thought comes at every new event. The sufferings of my poor father are near their end, for nature is worn out ; but were it not, I can foresee that means would be found to bring them to a close.”

“ Thou canst not suspect that any here would do him harm !”

“ I suspect none that belong to thee. Both

thy father and thyself, Gelsomina, are placed here by the interposition of the saints, that the fiends should not have too much power on earth."

"I do not understand thee, Carlo—but thou art often so.—Thy father used a word to-day that I could wish he had not, in speaking to thee."

The eye of the Bravo threw a quick, uneasy, suspicious glance at his companion, and then averted its look with haste.

"He called thee, Jacopo!" continued the girl.

"Men often have glimpses of their fate, by the kindness of their patrons."

"Wouldst thou say, Carlo, that thy father suspects the senate will employ the monster he named?"

"Why not?—They have employed worse men. If report says true, he is not unknown to them."

"Can this be so!—Thou art bitter against

the republic, because it has done injury to thy family ; but thou canst not believe it has ever dealt with the hired stiletto."

" I said no more than is whispered daily on the canals."

" I would thy father had not called thee by this terrible name, Carlo !"

" Thou art too wise to be moved by a word, Gelsomina. But what thinkest thou of my unhappy father ?"

" This visit has not been like the others thou hast made him in my company. I know not the reason, but to me thou hast ever seemed to feel the hope with which thou hast cheered the prisoner ; while now, thou seemest to have even a frightful pleasure in despair."

" Thy fears deceive thee ;" returned the Bravo, scarce speaking above his breath. " Thy fears deceive thee, and we will say no more. The senate mean to do us justice, at last. They are honourable Signori, of illustrious birth, and renowned names !—'T would be madness to

distrust the patricians! Dost thou not know, girl, that he who is born of gentle blood is above the weaknesses and temptations that beset us of base origin? They are men placed by birth above the weaknesses of mortals, and owing their account to none, they will be sure to do justice. This is reasonable, and who can doubt it!"

As he ended, the Bravo laughed bitterly.

"Nay, now thou triflest with me, Carlo; none are above the danger of doing wrong, but those whom the saints and kind Maria favour."

"This comes of living in a prison, and of saying thy prayers night and morning! No—no—silly girl, there are men in the world born wise, from generation to generation; born honest, virtuous, brave, incorruptible, and fit in all things to shut up and imprison those who are born base and ignoble. Where hast thou passed thy days, foolish Gelsomina, not to have felt this truth, in the very air thou breathest?"

'Tis clear as the sun's light, and palpable—ay—palpable as these prison-walls!"

The timid girl recoiled from his side, and there was a moment when she meditated flight; for never before, during their numberless and confidential interviews, had she ever heard so bitter a laugh, or seen so wild a gleam in the eye of her companion.

"I could almost fancy, Carlo, that thy father was right in using the name he did;" she said, as recovering herself, she turned a reproachful look on his still excited features.

"It is the business of parents to name their children;—but, enough. I must leave thee, good Gelsomina, and I leave thee with a heavy heart."

The unsuspecting Gelsomina forgot her alarm. She knew not why, but, though the imaginary Carlo seldom quitted her that she was not sad, she felt a weight heavier than common on her spirits at this declaration.

"Thou hast thy affairs, and they must not

be forgotten. Art fortunate with the gondola, of late, Carlo?"

"Gold and I are nearly strangers. The republic throws the whole charge of the venerable prisoner on my toil."

"I have little, as thou knowest, Carlo," said Gelsomina, in a half audible voice; "but it is thine. My father is not rich, as thou canst feel, or he would not live on the sufferings of others, by holding the keys of the prison."

"He is better employed than those who set the duty. Were the choice given me, girl, to wear the horned bonnet, to feast in their halls, to rest in their palaces, to be the gayest bauble in such a pageant as that of yesterday, to plot in their secret councils, and to be the heartless judge to condemn my fellows to this misery—or to be merely the keeper of the keys and turner of the bolts—I should seize on the latter office, as not only the most innocent, but by far the most honourable!"

"Thou dost not judge as the world judges,



Carlo. I had feared thou mightst feel shame at being the husband of a gaoler's daughter; nay, I will not hide the secret longer, since thou speakest so calmly, I have wept that it should be so."

"Then thou hast neither understood the world nor me. Were thy father of the senate, or of the Council of Three, could the grievous fact be known, thou wouldst have cause to sorrow. But, Gelsomina, the canals are getting dusky, and I must leave thee."

The reluctant girl saw the truth of what he said, and applying a key, she opened the door of the covered bridge. A few turnings and a short descent brought the Bravo and his companion to the level of the quays. Here the former took a hurried leave and quitted the prison.

CHAPTER XX.

But they who blunder thus are raw beginners.

Don Juan.

THE hour had come for the revels of the Piazza, and for the movement of the gondolas. Maskers glided along the porticos as usual, the song and cry were heard anew, and Venice was again absorbed in delusive gaiety.

When Jacopo issued from the prison on the quay, he mingled with the stream of human beings that was setting towards the squares, protected from observation by the privileged mask. While crossing the lower bridge of the canal of

St. Mark, he lingered an instant, to throw a look at the glazed gallery he had just quitted, and then moved forward with the crowd—the image of the artless and confiding Gelsomina uppermost in his thoughts. As he passed slowly along the gloomy arches of the Broglio, his eye sought the person of Don Camillo Monforte. They met at the angle of the little square, and exchanging secret signs, the Bravo moved on unnoticed.

Hundreds of boats lay at the foot of the Piazzetta. Among these Jacopo sought his own gondola, which he extricated from the floating mass, and urged into the stream. A few sweeps of the oar, and he lay at the side of La Bella Sorrentina. The padrone paced the deck, enjoying the cool of the evening, with Italian indolence, while his people sang, or rather chaunted, a song of those seas, grouped on the forecastle. The greetings were blunt and brief, as is usual among men of that class. But the padrone appeared to expect the visit, for he led his guest

far from the ears of his crew, to the other extremity of the feluca.

"Hast thou aught in particular, good Roderigo!" demanded the mariner, who knew the Bravo by a sign, and yet who only knew him by that fictitious name. "Thou seest we have not passed the time idly, though yesterday was a festa."

"Art thou ready for the gulf?"

"For the Levant, or the pillars of Hercules, as shall please the senate. We have got our yard aloft since the sun went behind the mountains, and though we may seem careless of delay, an hour's notice will fit us for the outside of the Lido."

"Then take the notice."

"Master Roderigo, you bring your news to an overstocked market. I have already been informed that we shall be wanted to-night."

The quick movement of suspicion made by the Bravo escaped the observation of the padrone, whose eye was running over the feluca's

gear, with a sailor's habitual attention to that part of his vessel, when there was question of its service.

"Thou art right, Stefano. But there is little harm in repeated caution. Preparation is the first duty in a delicate commission."

"Will you look for yourself, Signor Roderigo?" said the mariner, in a lower tone. "La Bella Sorrentina is not the Bucentaur, nor a galley of the Grand Master of Malta; but, for her size, better rooms are not to be had in the palace of the doge. When they told me there was a lady in the freight, the honour of Calabria was stirred in her behalf."

"Tis well. If they have named to thee all the particulars, thou wilt not fail to do thyself credit."

"I do not say that they have shewn me half of them, good Signore;" interrupted Stefano. "The secrecy of your Venetian shipments is my greatest objection to the trade. It has more than once happened to me, that I have lain

weeks in the canals, with my hold as clean as a friar's conscience, when orders have come to weigh, with some such cargo as a messenger, who has got into his berth as we cleared the port, to get out of it on the coast of Dalmatia, or among the Greek islands."

"In such cases thou hast earned thy money easily."

"Diamine! Master Roderigo, if I had a friend in Venice to give timely advice, the feluca might be ballasted with articles that would bring a profit, on the other shore. Of what concern is it to the senate, when I do my duty to the nobles faithfully, that I do my duty at the same time to the good woman and her little brown children, left at home, in Calabria?"

"There is much reason in what thou sayest, Stefano; but thou knowest the republic is a hard master. An affair of this nature must be touched with a gentle hand."

"None know it better than I, for when they

sent the trader with all his moveables out of the city, I was obliged to throw certain casks into the sea, to make room for his worthless stuffs. The senate owes me just compensation for that loss, worthy Signor Roderigo !”

“ Which thou wouldst be glad to repair, to-night ?”

“ Santissima Maria ! You may be the doge himself, Signore, for any thing I know of your countenance ; but I could swear at the altar you ought to be of the senate for your sagacity !— If this lady will not be burthened with many effects, and there is yet time, I might humour the tastes of the Dalmatians with certain of the articles that come from the countries beyond the pillars of Hercules !”

“ Thou art the judge of the probability thyself, since they told thee of the nature of thy errand.”

“ San Gennaro of Napoli, open my eyes !— They said not a word beyond this little fact, that a youthful lady, in whom the senate had

great interest, would quit the city this night for the eastern coast. If it is at all agreeable to your conscience, Master Roderigo, I should be happy to hear who are to be her companions?"

"Of that thou shalt hear more in proper season. In the meantime, I would recommend to thee a cautious tongue, for St. Mark makes no idle jokes with those who offend him. I am glad to see thee in this state of preparation, worthy padrone, and wishing thee a happy night, and a prosperous voyage, I commit thee to thy patron. But hold—ere I quit thee, I would know the hour that the land-breeze will serve?"

"You are as exact as a compass in your own matters, Signore, but of little charity to thy friends! With the burning sun of to-day we should have the air of the Alps, about the turn of the night."

"'Tis well.—My eye shall be on thee. Once more, addio."

"Cospetto! and thou hast said nothing of the cargo?"

"'Twill not be so weighty in bulk as in value," carelessly answered Jacopo, shoving his gondola from the side of the feluca. The fall of his oar into the water succeeded, and as Stefano stood, meditating the chances of his speculation on his deck, the boat glided away towards the quay, with a swift but easy movement.

Deceit, like the windings of that subtle animal the fox, often crosses its own path. It consequently throws out those by whom it is practised, as well as those who are meant to be its victims. When Jacopo parted from Don Camillo, it was with an understanding that he should adopt all the means that his native sagacity, or his experience might suggest, to ascertain in what manner the council intended to dispose of the person of Donna Violetta. They had separated on the Lido, and as none knew of their interview but him, and none would probably suspect their recent alliance, the Bravo

entered on his new duty with some chances of success, that might otherwise have been lost. A change of its agents, in affairs of peculiar delicacy, was one of the ordinary means taken by the republic to avoid investigation. Jacopo had often been its instrument in negotiating with the mariner, who, as has been so plainly intimated, had frequently been engaged in carrying into effect its secret, and perhaps justifiable measures of police; but in no instance had it ever been found necessary to interpose a second agent between the commencement and the consummation of its bargains, except in this. He had been ordered to see the padrone, and to keep him in preparation for immediate service; but since the examination of Antonio before the council, his employers had neglected to give him any farther instructions. The danger of leaving the bride within reach of the agents of Don Camillo was so obvious, that this unusual caution had been considered necessary. It was under this disadvantage, therefore, that Jacopo

entered on the discharge of his new and important duties.

That cunning, as has just been observed, is apt to over-reach itself, has passed into a proverb ; and the case of Jacopo and his employers was one in point, to prove its truth. The unusual silence of those who ordinarily sought him on similar occasions, had not been lost on the agent ; and the sight of the feluca, as he strayed along the quays, gave an accidental direction to his inquiries. The manner in which they were aided, by the cupidity of the Calabrian, has just been related.

Jacopo had no sooner touched the quay and secured his boat, than he hastened again to the Broglio. It was now filled by maskers and the idlers of the piazzetta. The patricians had withdrawn to the scenes of their own pleasures, or, in furtherance of that system of mysterious away which it was their policy to maintain, they did not choose to remain exposed to the com-

mon eye, during the hours of licence which were about to follow.

It would seem that Jacopo had his instructions, for no sooner did he make sure that Don Camillo had retired, than he threaded the throng with the air of a man whose course was decided. By this time, both the squares were full, and at least half of those who spent the night in those places of amusement, were masked. The step of the Bravo, though so unhesitating, was leisurely, and he found time, in passing up the Piazzetta, to examine the forms, and, when circumstances permitted, the features of all he met. He proceeded, in this manner, to the point of junction between the two squares, when his elbow was touched by a light hand.

Jacopo was not accustomed, unnecessarily, to trust his voice in the square of St. Mark, and at that hour. But his look of inquiry was returned by a sign to follow. He had been stopped by one, whose figure was so completely concealed by a domino, as to baffle all conjecture



concerning his true character. Perceiving, however, that the other wished to lead him to a part of the square that was vacant, and which was directly on the course he was about to pursue, the Bravo made a gesture of compliance and followed. No sooner were the two apart from the pressure of the crowd, and in a place where no eaves-dropper could overhear their discourse without detection, than the stranger stopped. He appeared to examine the person, stature, and dress of Jacopo, from beneath his mask, with singular caution, closing the whole with a sign that meant recognition. Jacopo returned his dumb shew, but maintained a rigid silence.

“Just Daniel!” muttered the stranger, when he found that his companion was not disposed to speak; “one would think, illustrious Signore, that your confessor had imposed a penance of silence, by the manner in which you refuse to speak to your servant.”

“What wouldst thou?”

“Here am I, sent into the piazza, among

knights of industry, valets, gondoliers, and all other manner of revellers that adorn this christian land, in search of the heir of one of the most ancient and honourable houses of Venice."

"How knowest thou I am he thou seekest?"

"Signore, there are many signs seen by a wise man, that escape the unobservant. When young cavaliers have a taste for mingling with the people in honourable disguise, as in the case of a certain young patrician of this republic, they are to be known by their air, if not by their voices."

"Thou art a cunning agent, Hosea ; but the shrewdness of thy race is its livelihood !"

"It is its sole defence against the wrongs of the oppressor, young noble. We are hunted like wolves, and it is not surprising that we sometimes shew the ferocity of the beasts you take us for. But why should I tell the wrongs of my people to one who believes life is a masquerade !"



"And who would not be sorry, ingenious Hosea, were it composed only of Hebrews! But, thy errand; I have no gage unredeemed, nor do I know that I owe thee gold."

"Righteous Samuel! you cavaliers of the senate are not always mindful of the past, Signore, or these are words that might have been spared. If your excellency is inclined to forget pledges, the fault is not of my seeking; but as for the account that has been so long growing between us, there is not a dealer on the Rialto that will dispute the proofs."

"Well, be it so — wouldst thou dun my father's son in the face of the revellers in St. Mark?"

"I would do no discredit to any come of that illustrious race, Signore, and therefore we will say no more of the matter; always relying that, at the proper moment, you will not question your own hand and seal."

"I like thy prudence, Hebrew. It is a pledge thou comest on some errand less ungra-

cious than common. As I am pressed for time 'twill be a favour wert thou to name it."

Hosea examined, in a covert but very thorough manner, the vacant spot around them, and drawing nearer to the supposed noble, he continued.

"Signore, your family is in danger of meeting with a great loss! It is known to you that the senate has altogether and suddenly removed Donna Violetta, from the keeping of the faithful and illustrious senator your father."

Though Jacopo started slightly, the movement was so natural for a disappointed lover, that it rather aided than endangered his disguise.

"Cautious yourself, young Signor," rejoined Hosea: "these disappointments aimed at all in youth, as I came in some time. I can see the ground without seeing, and see a man in a better, because it has a purpose for the man himself. What is a good man, what is a man, and a man's purpose. But,

you are nearer to losing the lady of your love and her possessions, than you may imagine, for I am sent expressly to say, that she is about to be removed from the city."

"Whither?" demanded Jacopo, so quickly as to do credit to his assumed character.

"That is the point to learn, Signore. Thy father is a sagacious senator, and is deep, at times, in the secrets of the state. But, judging from his uncertainty on this occasion, I take it he is guided more by his calculations, than by any assurance of his own knowledge. Just Daniel! I have seen the moments when I have suspected that the venerable patrician himself was a member of the Council of Three!"

"His house is ancient and his privileges well established—why should he not?"

"I say nought against it, Signore. It is a wise body, that doeth much good, and preventeth much harm. None speak evil of the secret councils on the Rialto, where men are more given to gainful industry than to wild dis-

cussions of their rulers' acts. But, Signore, be he of this or that council, or merely of the senate, a heedful hint has fallen from his lips, of the danger we are in of losing—”

“ We !—Hast thou thoughts of Donna Violetta, Hosea ?”

“ Leah, and the law forbid !—If the comely queen of Sheba, herself, were to tempt me, and a frail nature shewed signs of weakness, I doubt that our rabbis would find reasons for teaching self-denial ! Besides, the daughter of Levi is no favourer of polygamy, nor of any other of our sex's privileges. I spoke in pluralities, Signore, because the Rialto has some stake in this marriage, as well as the house of Gradenigo.”

“ I understand thee. Thou hast fears for thy gold ?”

“ Had I been easily alarmed, Signor Giacomo, in that particular, I might not have parted with it so readily. But, though the succession of thy illustrious father will be ample to meet any loan within my humble means, that of the

late Signor Tiepolo will not weaken the security."

"I admit thy sagacity, and feel the importance of thy warning. But it seems to have no other object, or warranty, than thy own fears."

"With certain obscure hints from your honoured father, Signore."

"Did he say more to the point?"

"He spoke in parables, young noble, but having an oriental ear, his words were not uttered to the wind. That the rich damsel is about to be conveyed from Venice am I certain, and for the benefit of the little stake I have myself in her movements, I would give the best turquoise in my shop to know whither."

"Canst thou say with certainty, 'twill be this night."

"Giving no pledge for redemption in the event of mistake, I am so sure, young cavalier, as to have many unquiet thoughts."

"Enough—I will look to my own interests, and to thine."

Jacopo waved his hand in adieu, and pursued his walk up the piazza.

"Had I looked more sharply to the latter, as became one accustomed to deal with the accursed race," muttered the Hebrew, "it would be a matter of no concern to me if the girl married a Turk!"

"Hosea," said a mask at his ear; "a word with thee, in secret."

The jeweller started, and found that, in his zeal, he had suffered one to approach within sound of his voice unseen. The other was in a domino also, and so well enveloped as to be effectually concealed.

"What wouldst thou, Signor Mask?" demanded the wary Jew.

"A word in friendship, and in confidence.—Thou hast moneys to lend at usury?"

"The question had better be put to the republic's treasury! I have many stones, valued much below their weight, and would be glad to put them, with some one more

lucky than myself, who will be able to keep them."

"Nay, this will not suffice—thou art known to be abounding in sequins; one of thy race and riches will never refuse a sure loan, with securities as certain as the laws of Venice. A thousand ducats in thy willing hand is no novelty."

"They who call me rich, Signor Mask, are pleased to joke with the unhappy child of a luckless race. That I might have been above want—nay, that I am not downright needy, may be true; but when they speak of a thousand ducats, they speak of affairs too weighty for my burthened shoulders. Were it your pleasure to purchase an amethyst, or a ruby, gallant Signore, there might possibly be dealings between us?"

"I have need of gold, old man, and can spare thee jewels myself, at need. My wants are urgent, at this moment, and I have little time to lose in words—name thy conditions."

“One should have good securities, Signore, to be so peremptory in a matter of money.”

“Thou hast heard that the laws of Venice are not more certain. A thousand sequins, and that quickly. Thou shalt settle the usury with thine own conscience.”

Hosea thought that this was giving ample room to the treaty, and he began to listen more seriously.

“Signore,” he said, “a thousand ducats are not picked up at pleasure, from the pavement of the great square. He who would lend them, must first earn them with long and patient toil; and he who would borrow——”

“Waits at thy elbow.”

“Should have a name and countenance well known on the Rialto.”

“Thou lendest on sufficient pledges to masks, careful Hosea, or fame belies thy generosity.”

“A sufficient pledge gives me power to see the way clearly, though the borrower should be

as much hidden as those up above. But here is none forthcoming. Come to me to-morrow, masked or not, as may suit your own pleasure, for I have no impertinent desire to pry into any man's secrets, beyond what a regard to my own interests requires, and I will look into my coffers; though those of no heir-apparent in Venice can be emptier."

"My necessities are too urgent to brook delay. Hast thou the gold, on condition of naming thine own usury?"

"With sufficient pledges in stones of price, I might rake together the sum, among our dispersed people, Signore. But he who goes on the island to borrow, as I shall be obliged to do, should be able to satisfy all doubts concerning the payment."

"The gold can then be had—on that point I may be easy?"

Hosea hesitated, for he had in vain endeavoured to penetrate the other's disguise, and while he thought his assurance a favourable

omen, with a lender's instinct he disliked his impatience.

"I have said, by the friendly aid of our people;" he answered, with caution.

"This uncertainty will not answer my need. Addio, Hosea,—I must seek elsewhere."

"Signore, you could not be more hurried were the money to pay the cost of your nuptials. Could I find Isaac and Aaron within, at this late hour, I think I might be safe in saying, that part of the money might be had."

"I cannot trust to this chance."

"Nay, Signore, the chance is but small, since Aaron is bed-ridden, and Isaac never fails to look into his affairs, after the toil of the day is ended. The honest Hebrew finds sufficient recreation in the employment, though I marvel at his satisfaction, since nothing but losses have come over our people the year past!"

"I tell thee, Jew, no doubt must hang over the negotiation. The money, with pledges, and thine own conscience for arbiter between us; but no equivocal dealings, to be followed by a disap-

pointment, under the pretence that second parties are not satisfied."

"Just Daniel ! to oblige you, Signore, I think I may venture !—The well-known Hebrew, Levi of Livorno, has left with me a sack, containing the very sum of which there is question, and, under the conditions named, I will convert it to my uses, and repay the good jeweller his gold, with moneys of my own, at a later day."

"I thank thee for the fact, Hosea ;" said the other, partially removing his mask, but as instantly replacing it. "It will greatly shorten our negotiations. Thou hast not that sack of the Jew of Livorno beneath thy domino ?"

Hosea was speechless. The removal of the mask had taught him two material facts. He had been communicating his distrust of the Senate's intentions, concerning Donna Violetta, to an unknown person, and, possibly, to an agent of the police ; and he had just deprived himself of the only argument he had ever found available, in refusing the attempts of Giacomo Gra-

denigo to borrow, by admitting to that very individual, that he had in his power the precise sum required.

“ I trust the face of an old customer is not likely to defeat our bargain, Hosea ?” demanded the profligate heir of the senator, scarce concealing the irony in which the question was put.

“ Father Abraham ! Had I known it had been you, Signor Giacomo, we might have greatly shortened the treaty.”

“ By denying that thou hadst the money, as thou hast so often done of late !”

“ Nay, nay, I am not a swallower of my own words, young Signore ; but my duty to Levi must not be forgotten. The careful Hebrew made me take a vow, by the name of our tribe, that I would not part with his gold, to any that had not the means of placing its return beyond all chances.”

“ This assurance is not wanting, since thou art the borrower, thyself, to lend to me.”

“ Signore, you place my conscience in an

awkward position. You are now my debtor some six thousand sequins, and were I to make this loan of money in trust, and were you to return it—two propositions I make on supposition—a natural love for my own might cause me to pass the payment to account, whereby I should put the assets of Levi in jeopardy.”

“Settle that as thou wilt with thy conscience, Hosea—thou hast confessed to the money, and here are jewels for the pledge—I ask only the sequins.”

It is probable that the appeal of Giacomo Gradenigo would not have produced much effect on the flinty nature of the Hebrew, who had all the failings of a man proscribed by opinion; but having recovered from his surprise, he began to explain to his companion his apprehensions on account of Donna Violetta, whose marriage, it will be remembered, was a secret to all but the witnesses and the Council of Three, when to his great joy he found that the gold was wanting to advance his own design of re-

moving her to some secret place. This immediately changed the whole face of the bargain. As the pledges offered were really worth the sum to be received, Hosea thought, taking the chances of recovering back his ancient loans, from the foreign estates of the heiress, into the account, the loan would be no bad investment of the pretended sequins of his friend Levi.

As soon as the parties had come to a clear understanding, they left the square together, to consummate their bargain.

END OF VOL. II.

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